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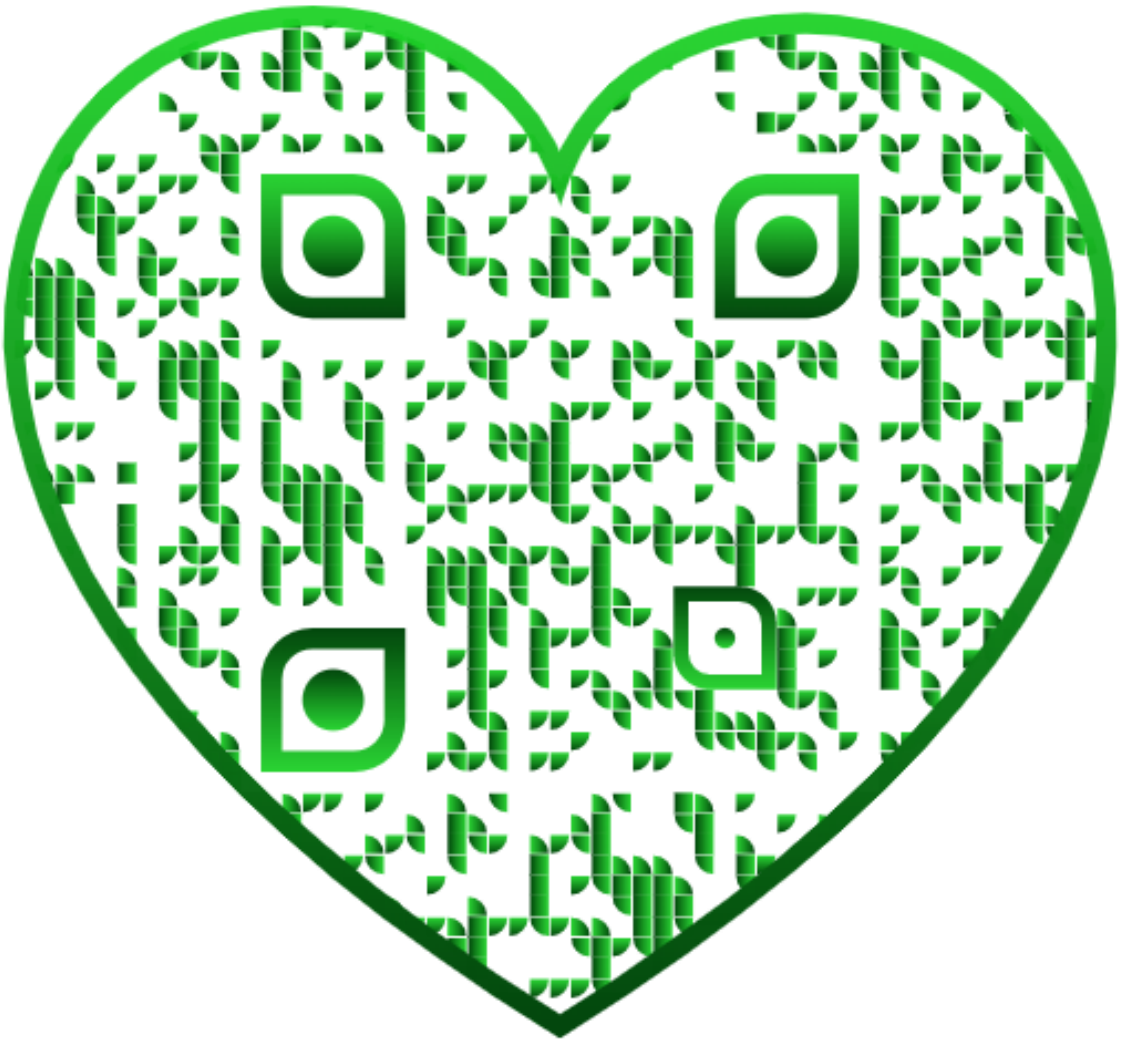

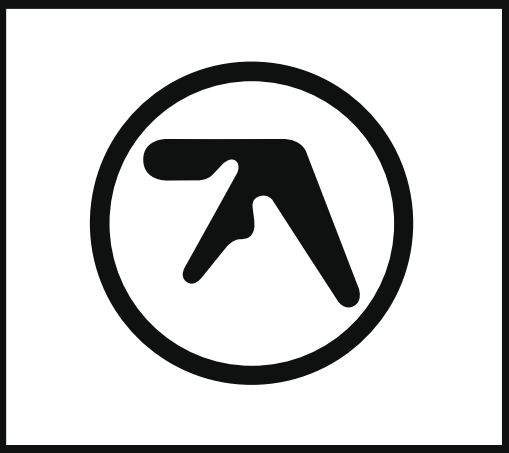

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Editor's Note

OCTOBER_NOVEMBER 2016

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V43 NO7

THE FIRST RULE you're taught as a writer is to use your words wisely, but I have a bad habit of overusing a specific phrase in my articles and social media posts: Venn diagram. According to the almighty Merriam-Webster, it means, "a graph that employs closed curves and especially circles to represent logical relations between and operations on sets and the terms of propositions by the inclusion, exclusion or intersection of the curves."

Besides proving that I was paying way more attention in science class than some of my grades probably reflected, the reason I'm so drawn to this particular noun these days is that—as an editor of a music magazine that was founded as a Grateful Dead journal and continues to track the world of live, improvisational music—I spend a good portion of my day thinking about a wide range of bands through a very specific lens and, hopefull , pointing out some of those "logical relations."

While certainly not the only way to think about the eclectic range of bands we try to cram into our eight issues a year, I've always felt it was an interesting journalistic perspective and a unique opportunity to connect the dots between the 43 years of bands that *Relix* has covered since its inception.

Now, unfortunately I sometimes have a hard time turning off that part of y brain when I'm at a concert and, much to the chagrin of whoever is standing next to me, I feel the need to point out some of those connections when I should probably just surrender to the fl w. That was especially the case at the two festivals that bookended my summer this year: Bonnaroo and

A few friends from Vermont

Lockn'. In certain respects, they come at the same objective in opposite ways. Bonnaroo prides itself on its wide–ranging bookings and its ability to see how a number of performers react and commune in a finit , kaleidoscopic space, while Lockn' focuses on a carefully curated scene and the collaborations and supergroup pairings that are created when you drop those groups on a single, rotating stage. Yet they are both, essentially, about nurturing a community and vibe that not only feels cohesive in its scope, but also always provides a gateway for fans hoping to explore some of those crazy, Venn diagram curves.

It's a theme we think about a lot in the *Relix* offi . In this issue's cover story, the members of Phish, who have served as a gateway for many readers to a jukebox of bands, discuss their varied influences and approaches to creating *Big Boat*, a genre-jumping thematic record that feels like a classic LP in the age of downloads and digital singles. Elsewhere, Bob Weir and Josh Ritter discuss their new collection of cowboy songs and how those fabled tales served as a wormhole for Weir and the Dead to explore the American West. Our October_November issue is loaded with artists who broke through to the masses by playing a very specific tyle and have since broadened their scope, whether that style is indie-rock (Local Natives), Afrobeat and funk (The Motet), soul (St. Paul & The Broken Bones), Southern rock (Blackberry Smoke) or even dinner-theater music (Nahko and Medicine for the People).

As we celebrate our 275th issue, we're still committed to both expanding the magazine's palette and figuring out unique ways to explore those overlapping circles that can only be described as the Venn diagram of the *Relix* Family.

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#RELIXFAM

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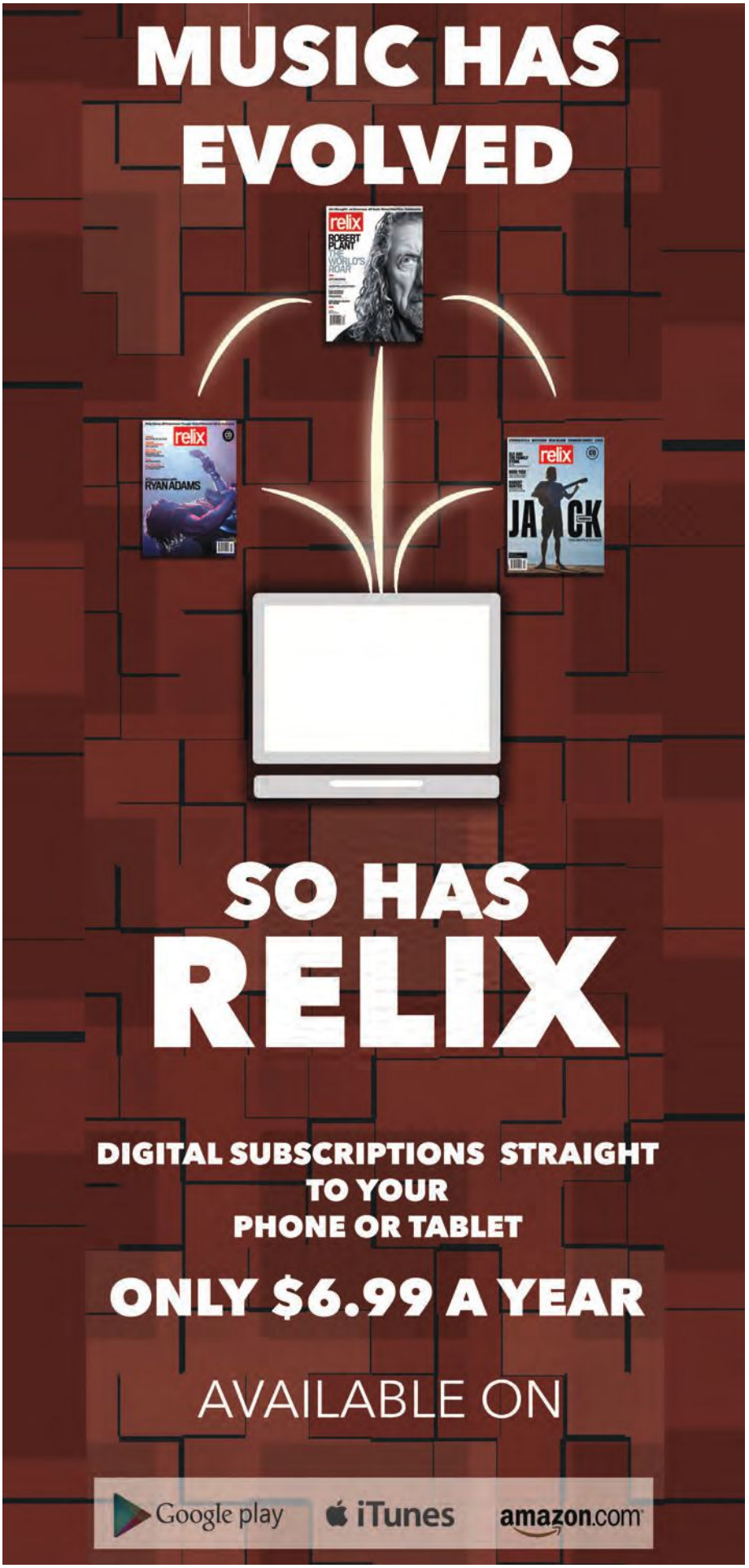
ON THE COVER

Brantley Gutierrez shot Phish



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FEATURES

54 Four Friends from Vermont
Phish's music is often poweful, but rarely direct. So, after wrapping up 2014's *Fuego*, veteran producer Bob Ezrin challenged the quartet to look inward and reveal a bit more of themselves through their songs. The result of that exercise is *Big Boat*, a deeply personal album that explores such heady topics as loss, aging, domestic life, community and friendship. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** spoke with the members of the 33-year-old group as they prepared to roll out *Big Boat*, and finds out h w four men in their 50s are still figuring out new ays to capture their classic sound.

52 The Charge of the Light Brigade
St. Paul & The Broken Bones were branded soulful romantics from the moment their fir t LP dropped. Yet, from its opening number, *Sea of Noise,* their sophmore release, reflects some eightier themes and shows off a far broader stylistic palette. The band's **Paul Janeway** and **Jesse Phillips** recently looked back on their early work with The Secret Dangers, reflected on their meteoric rise (and dry-cleaning deal) and explained to Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** how their new lyrical direction was part of a conscious effort to create a modern soul record.

50 Letting It Fly
Blackberry Smoke's success has been slow and steady, as the band builds its sizable fanbase one show at a time. Along the way, the Southern-rock quintet has become the rare act to feel equally at home on a country bill and the jamband circuit. They've shared the stage with Zac Brown, rubbed elbows with Gregg Allman and credit Chris Robinson with dreaming up their name. Yet, as Associate Editor **Rob Slater** discovers, even with their new album, *Like an Arrow*, poised to take them to new heights, the members of Blackberry Smoke are still just fi e guys from Atlanta.

46 One More River to Cross
Bob Weir is in the midst of a creative renaissance, headlining stadiums and sheds with Dead & Company and collaborating with a who's who of modern musicians. He's also spent the past few years working on *Blue Mountain*, a collection of blue-collar cowboy songs inspired by his time living on a ranch in Wyoming. Shortly before the album's release, the Grateful Dead ambassador sat for a wide-ranging conversation with his *Blue Mountain* lyricist and collaborator, indie-folk hero **Josh Ritter**, and discussed their recent adventures in the Wild, Wild West.

43 What Deaner Was Talkin' About
Mickey Melchiondo's artistic output and unique personality have long been intertwined. So when his oddball alt-rock band parted ways for a few years in 2012, the artist better known as **Dean Ween** faced a major crossroads. After pondering a life outside the music world, Melchiondo decided to strike out on his own with a fresh commitment to the classic song-a-day approach. The result, as Assistant Editor **Matt Inman** explains, is a continuation of that brown sound that can only be described as very Ween.

40 Power to the People
Over the past few years, **Nahko and Medicine for the People** have become festival staples across the globe, recognized for their engaging performances and political passions. Editor-in-Chief **Dean Budnick** spoke with the group's namesake, **Nahko Bear**, about both his personal development and the group's growth, touching on Alaskan dinner theater, growing vetiver in Hawaii, a profound prison encounter at San Quentin and Nahko's ongoing efforts to do social ork from the stage.

38 The Motet in Motion
The Motet has always embraced change, whether it's a slight shift in sound, a lineup swap or adding a new cover to their repertoire, thanks to their open-eared Halloween shows. However, last year, Colorado's unofficia funk house band experienced one of the biggest transitions in their career when they parted ways with their longtime frontman. **John Adamian** caught up with The Motet as the band entered the next phase of its evolution with a new record and new, soulful East Coast singer.

34 Free to Be You and Me
Local Natives have always embraced a sense of healthy competition, allowing room for three multi-instrumentalist singers and a crucial rhythm section that contributes to their emotive, harmony-stacked arrangements. But following a trip to Thailand at the end of 2014, the indie-rock darlings decided to toss out the script with their third, highly collaborative LP, *Sunlit Youth*. The Los Angeles group recently spoke with **Ryan Reed** about their new creative approach, which manages to cut through egos and draw inspiration from unexpected sounds.

Danny Clinch (Matthews), Peter Wallace (Nahko), Matthew Shelter (Springsteen)

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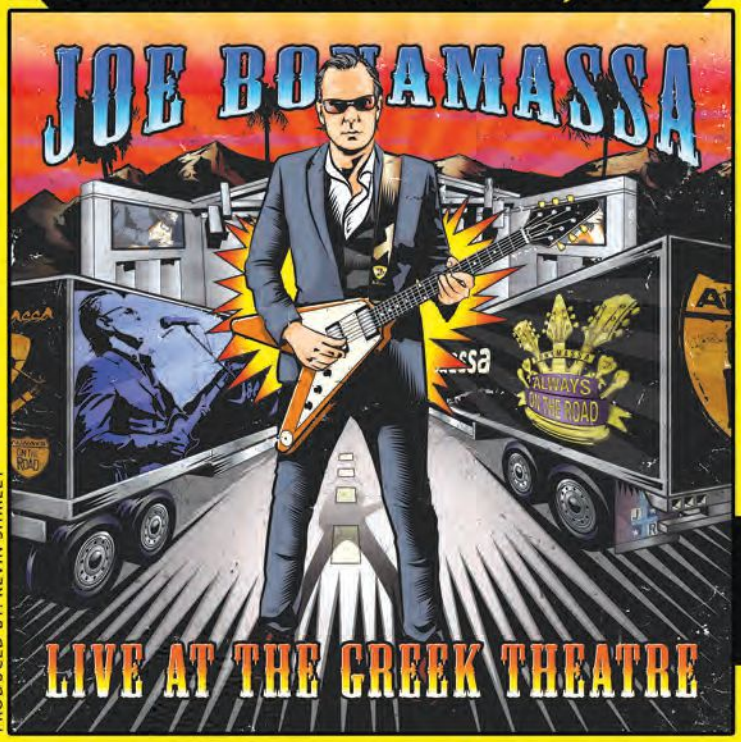

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Dear Relix

Here's what readers are talking about online and offli

DEAR RELIX

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

STS9 EXPLORE *THE UNIVERSE INSIDE*

Thanks for this—it is really cool to hear what has been happening with the band from Alana's perspective ("The Core: Alana Rocklin," September 2016). I have loved Sector 9 for a long time and love what Alana has brought to the band. The new album is awesome! Can't wait to hear the tracks live!!

Madlelyn Johnson via Relix.com

THE FAITHFUL WEIGH IN

Back in August, Phil Lesh told Rolling Stone *that he thought the Grateful Dead were never quite the same after they returned to the road following their hiatus from late 1974 to mid-1976. "Even though it was great and we played fantastic music, something was missing," Lesh said. A number of Relix.com readers shared their thoughts on Lesh's comments and the band's sonic evolution in the '70s.*

The Dead hit their stride in '70, perfected it in '72, and wrote and played beautifully up to '74. After that, there were a few great tunes and flashes of li e brilliance now and then, but I constantly found myself leaving shows wishing for the old days, or at least better setlists.

Stich via Relix.com

I somewhat agree with Phil. I saw the Dead about 75 times between 1972 and 1978. My last great shows were at the Uptown Theatre in Chicago in 1978.

Andy Stone via Relix.com

I don't think Phil drinks from the same well as some of us. But that's why he's Phil! I find yself at odds with his opinions quite often, but he has every right to call it as he sees it. The deep, dark, dangerous Dead never did return after the hiatus.

Zeb via Relix.com

Phil Lesh

Phil is spot on, and why wouldn't he be? There was never a bad show before the break, and many mediocre ones after. All you folks that didn't see the shows don't know what you're talking about—go listen to the archives and get tuned in.

Bobo via Relix.com

I don't know why this continues to be a controversial point. It's plainly obvious if you listen to the tapes. Lots of great music after '74, but never to the consistent level that came before.

Adam via Relix.com

FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Ween performing at Arrington, Va.'s Lockn' on August 25, 2016.

Photo by Peter Wallace.

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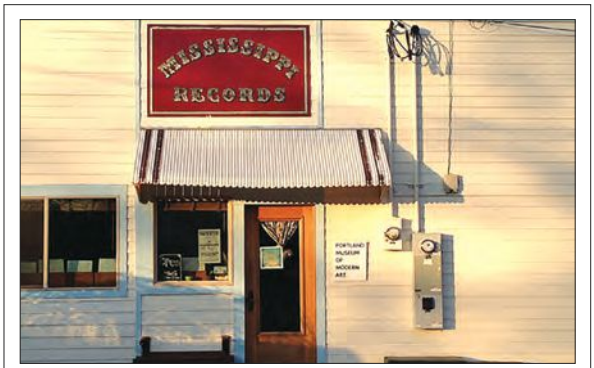

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Dean Budnick (Lesh)

INSTAPRINT

Dave Matthews Band said goodbye to their fans, at least for a year, with a three-night blowout at the Gorge Amphitheatre in George, Wash., over Labor Day weekend. The shows marked their 53-55th appearances at the picturesque venue. Each night, Carlos Malta also joined Dave Matthews Band's steady horn section of Jeff Coffin and Ra wn Ross for a portion of the night. Malta began sitting in with DMB during their 2008 tour and has popped up sporadically along the way. Jeff Coffin (@jeffco snapped a photo of Malta with Matthews at the band's final .

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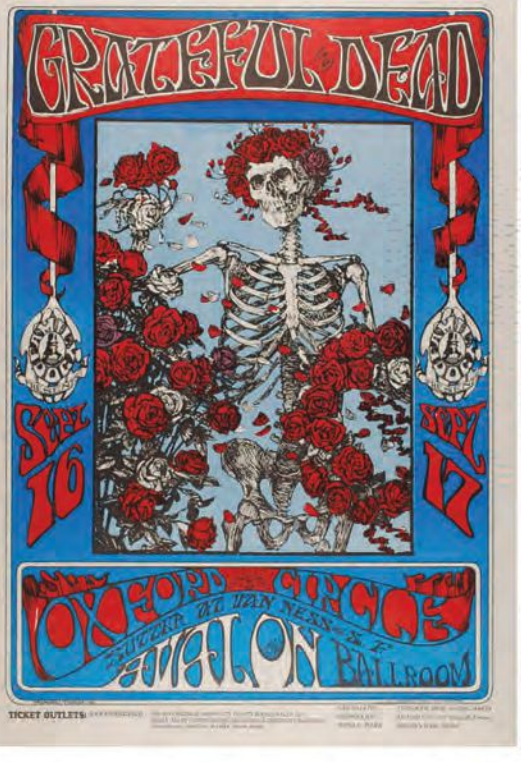

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The Beat

THE BEST FROM FESTS & TOURS TODAY

LOCKN' FESTIVAL

ARRINGTON, VA.
AUGUST 25-28
BY DEAN BUDNICK // PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN BUDNICK, STUART LEVINE AND DAVE VANN

My Morning Jacket's Jim James

The fourth annual **Lockn' Festival** proved to be a return to form for the event—once again nestled comfortably within the Blue Ridge Mountains on Arrington, Va.'s Oak Ridge Farm. While Lockn' 2015 was curtailed by a day due to a freak atmospheric microburst, this year festivalgoers enjoyed four days of sun and sounds on the bucolic site. Temperatures nudged into the 90s during the latest go-round, held two weeks earlier than previous years, easing the competition with local college football fanatics for resources.

One more significant adjustment: While in past years Lockn' divided music between the adjacent Oak and Ridge Stages, in 2016, the performances took place at a single locale. As per Lockn' tradition, however, the music still flowed from act to act through the use of a turntable stage that allowed the next group to plug in while the current band was still performing. Changeovers then took place on the fly at the conclusion of each set, as the players rotated into position (which allowed for occasional antics from the musicians cycling off he stage and rolling into place).

Lockn' has fostered a familiar, familial atmosphere, by welcoming many returning artists. The list of musicians who made their fourth Lockn' appearance in 2016 includes: **Tedeschi Trucks Band**, **Chris Robinson, Dave Schools**, **Keller Williams**, **Joe Russo**, **Michael Travis** and **Jason Hann**.

Still, the festival has maintained its vitality by regularly introducing complementary acts that share a similar spirit of fluidity and freedom. This year's additions included four groups that performed on two separate days at Lockn': **Phish** (who headlined on Friday and then closed out the fest on Sunday), **Ween** (who took the top slot on Thursday and preceded Phish on Friday), **Vulfpeck** (who won over thousands of new ears during the first two days of the fest through a versatile skill set and bountiful pizzazz) and **Twiddle** (whose improv-laden appearances on Saturday and Sunday embodied the ethos that has informed the festival, founded by H.O.R.D.E. co-creator **Dave Frey** and former Wetlands Preserve owner **Peter Shapiro**).

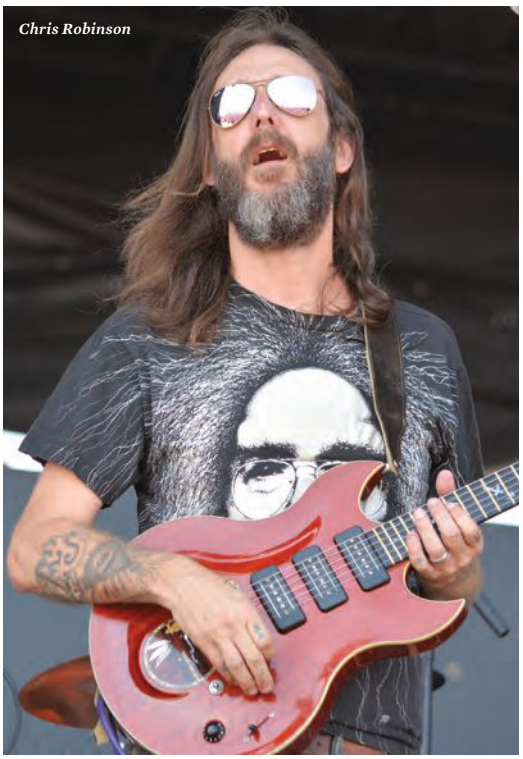
Vulfpeck opened the festivities on Thursday with an animated performance that drew heavily on winning originals, such as "Christmas in L.A." and "Funky Duck." **Umphrey's McGee** followed, with lighting designer **Jefferson Waful** making use of the turntable stage to dramatic effect during a high-energy performance that provided a notable segue from "The Triple Wide" into "2x2," "Speak Up" and then back into "2x2," as well as a guest appearance by **Aaron "Gene Ween" Freeman** on vocals for Billy Joel's "The Stranger" (revisiting his "Gene Ween Does Billy Joel" tour and their collaboration at Summer Camp 2015 as "Godboner Meets Gene Ween"). Ween then commanded the stage for two hours, opening with "Transdermal Celebration" and offering their signature, twisted takes on songs like "Fat Lenny," "A Tear for Eddie" and "Poopship Destroyer."

Friday's full day of music kicked off ith **Moogatu**, the Rockn' to Lockn' contest winner from 2015, whose Thursday slot was cancelled last year. (This year's winners, **DJ Williams Projekt** and **The Dharma Initiative**, joined the lineup later in the weekend.) Soon after, **Turkuaz** contributed a colorful set, while Vulfpeck built on the momentum of their previous performance. **White Denim** showcased their confidence and precision with the addition of Joe Russo's

Stuart Levine

Almost Dead guitarist **Scott Metzger** for a few tunes, while both **Charles Bradley & His Extraordinaires** and **Peter Wolf** made dynamic appearances abundant in spirit and soul. Ween's return at dusk drew on such crowd favorites as "Roses Are Free," "Bananas and Blow" and "Touch My Tooter." Finally, opening with an audience-abetted "Wilson" chant, Phish's first-ever performance at the fest extended over two sets and spanned the group's career while yielding favorable takes on "Ghost," "Punch You in the Eye," "Blaze On" and "Character Zero."

My Morning Jacket made the most of its Saturday headlining slot, rising to the occasion with a grandiose performance that—along with offering up anthemic versions of such songs as "Steam Engine," "One Big Holiday" and "Touch Me I'm Going to Scream Part 2"—included exhilarating debut covers of Burt Bacharach's "What the World Needs Now Is Love" and David Bowie's "Rebel Rebel," as well as sparkling readings of Prince's "Purple Rain" and Bob Marley's "Could You Be Loved." Tedeschi Trucks Band preceded them with another memorable set that showcased the group's range with rousing interpretations of such songs as "Keep on Growing," "Bitches Brew" and "Sticks and Stones," bookended by originals from their latest record, *Let Me Get By*. **Susan Tedeschi** and **Derek Trucks** also guested on **Phil Lesh & Friends**' affable performance during "Mr. Charlie" and "Sugaree," amidst a crowded roster that featured **The Infamous Stringdusters**, Joe Russo, **Anders Osborne**, and Phish's **Jon Fishman** and **Page McConnell**. Lockn' Saturday also encompassed a lively, vigorous appearance by **Hard Working Americans** with vocalist **Todd Snider** displaying ample doses of charisma and humor, and a funky set by **Galactic** with guest vocalist **Erica Falls** and War harmonica player **Lee Oskar**. A notable summit also occurred on Saturday evening in the Super VIP tent, where Phil Lesh and Phish's **Mike Gordon** joined Dave Schools and Hard Working Americans for "Steal Your Bass."


Chris Robinson

Gene Ween

Vulfpeck

Twiddle

Phish

The concluding day of Lockn' produced its fair share of highlights, too. **Doobie Decibel System**, Twiddle and **The Wailers** drew on their disparate backgrounds and common aesthetics to captivate a swelling crowd of listeners. Then, **Chris Robinson Brotherhood** stepped out for an absorbing set of originals before welcoming Phil Lesh to the stage for a 90-minute set of Grateful Dead material that erupted early on, through the addition of **Gary Clark Jr.** on "Good Morning, Little Schoolgirl" and "Wang Dang Doodle." Following Clark's own intense performance, Phish returned for another two sets of music that featured fun takes on "Martian Monster," "Fuck Your Face" and "Possum," as well as a particularly vibrant second-set sequence that fl wed from "Twist" into "Light," "Tweezer" and "No Quarter."

Beyond the main stage, performances also extended into the far corners of the site over the course of the festival, during the late nights and "early" (10:30 a.m.) mornings. **Joe Russo's Almost Dead** commanded the Blue Ridge Bowl on Thursday and Friday with their exuberant takes on the Dead catalog and even welcomed **Nicole Atkins** for an unannounced guest turn. Keller Williams greeted the Lockn' faithful on Saturday and Sunday mornings, fir t with his **Grateful Grass** project and later with **Grateful Gospel**. The Woods opened ears and eyes to **Khruangbin**, **EOTO** and the highly anticipated debut of **Neal Casal**'s **Circles Around the Sun** project, which fir t crystallized when Casal created original set-break music for last year's Fare Thee Well shows. Beyond this, over at Garcia's Forest, **DJ Jerrbrother** supplied a moving mix of live Jerry Garcia performances at full concert sound with multilayered visual production. As Jerrbrother (aka **Brett Fairbrother**) declared, "In 2016, where else but Lockn' are you going to hear classic Jerry played with such volume and clarity, alongside thousands of friends you haven't met yet? There's nothing else like it."

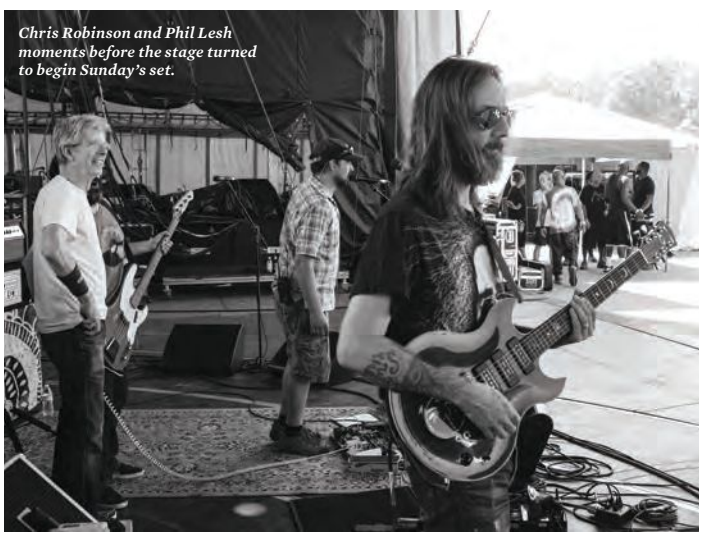
Dean Budnick (Robinson and Twiddle), Stuart Levine (Ween and Vulfpeck), Dave Vann (Phish).

LOCKN' EXPOSED

Neal Casal is not only an accomplished musician, but also a gifted photographer, who shares his perspective on this year's Lockn'.

My view from the stage during the CRB/Phil Lesh set.

Circles Around the Sun rehearsing on site at Lockn' several hours before our first live show.



Chris Robinson and Phil Lesh moments before the stage turned to begin Sunday's set.

Adam MacDougall preparing his keyboards for the Sunday CRB performance.

Mike Gordon, Dave Schools, and Phil Lesh setting up and talking over the "Steal Your Bass" late night set.

Phil Lesh and Chris Robinson joyfully in the moment as our Sunday afternoon set wound down.

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Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* **DEAN BUDNICK**

Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band "Prove It All Night" in Foxboro

Matthew Shelter

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND

GILLETTE STADIUM
FOXBOROUGH, MASS.
SEPTEMBER 14

Eight months and 75 shows after it began, **Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band**'s "The River Tour" wrapped up with a four-hour marathon at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Mass. Along the way, the tour morphed from an arena show featuring full-length performances of *The River* into a larger stadium event that all but abandoned *The River* setlist in favor of a stroll further down memory lane to the early '70s.

The late-summer run of stadium dates broke and then re-broke Bruce's record for his longest U.S. concert, with three of the shows, including Foxborough, topping the four-hour mark. (The record went to Philadelphia at 4:04.)

Much of the first half of the 25-song main set was dominated by tracks from *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* and *The Wild, the Innocent & the E Street Shuffle*, both of which were released in 1973. The show kicked off ith "New York City Serenade," a late-season addition to the setlist that had previously been performed only rarely by the group. Perhaps the pending publication of his autobiography sent Springsteen drifting back to the early days, as he reeled off ne '73 classic after another: "Blinded by the Light," "It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City," "Growin' Up," "Spirit in the Night" and "Rosalita" among them. After that, Bruce and the band sampled all eras, from "Darkness on the Edge of Town" and "No Surrender" through "Light of Day," "American Skin (41 Shots)" and "Radio Nowhere."

Even if "Prove It All Night" and "The Promised Land," two songs that used to barrel along in a pure adrenaline rush, were a beat slower than they once were, Springsteen and The E Street Band still delivered stunning moments throughout the night. **Nils Lofgren** and **Steven Van Zandt** shredded "Kitty's Back" and "Because the Night," while the band also offered an unbridled "Detroit Medley," a soaring, sing-along "Jungleland" and the spiritual communion of "The Rising," just days after 9/11's 15th anniversary.

Stadiums are rarely the ideal place to see an artist, but Springsteen remains one of the best at making oversized venues feel intimate, plunging into the crowd and repeatedly interacting with the audience, including taking song requests via handmade signs he snatches from fans. "It never gets old," he said near the end of the show, scanning the near-capacity crowd. "It's an amazing thing to see all the people who still support your music after all these years."

Matthew Shelter

READ THE BOOK

The third edition of **The Phish Companion: A Guide to the Band & Their Music** is more than an essential reference guide. It's a hard-bound, 898-page, full-color feast for the senses.

- Thousands of freshly-manicured setlists, song histories, and charts
- Hundreds of evocative show reviews and fan stories
- 128 pages of dazzling Phish photography, most of which has never been published
- Stunning original art

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EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY

WILMA THEATER
MISSOULA, MONT.
SEPTEMBER 6

Go ahead and brand **Explosions in the Sky** with whatever genre tag you want; in the end, their live show can really only be explained in terms of emotional reaction. There's a reason their instrumental epics, once described by the band as "cathartic mini-symphonies," have been used to underscore dramatic gravity in dozens of films and TV shows, from *CSI* to *The Kite Runner*. Their tour stop in Missoula, Mont., played out as an act of cinematic elegance from start to finish.

From the moment the five-piece hit the stage and began to play, they transformed the ambience of the historic Wilma Theater into something entirely their own. Beginning with the title track o° their new record, *The Wilderness,* the band launched into a set of atmospheric conjuring without stopping once to address the crowd. Despite the lack of vocals, the songs o° ered up a powerful narrative. A band without a frontman is rare, even in instrumental circles, but this outfit doesn't show a leader or o° er a real focal member, and their sonic landscapes are better o° without such distractions. That's not to say that the musicians aren't animated—guitarist **Mark Smith** and bassist **Carlos Torres**' whole bodies gave into the movement of the music without exuding campy flamboyance.

Watching the music of EITS unfold live is less like a typical rock-concert experience and more like watching a force of nature at work. Songs ebb and flow and transform the way a storm system moves across a horizon, touching both resplendent beauty and unrepentant might. The group is heavy, but not in a thrashy, macho sort of way; EITS are heavy like the ocean beating the shoreline with sheer, hypnotic power. Even under the weight of the three-guitar attack in songs like "Catastrophe and the Cure," strains of tender melody can be found weaving through the dense, overdriven chord changes.

The applause came during the brief lulls; the band never really o° ered succinct stopping points between songs. Still, the *Friday Night Lights* soundtrack song "Your Hand in Mine" drew the greatest audience response and set up the new tune "Disintegration Anxiety" perfectly. Their 90-minute set ended as gracefully as it started—without an encore, just a brief thank you from the band, as the last threads of textured melody bled out through the speakers. ***Jed Nussbaum***

JEFF LYNNE'S ELO

HOLLYWOOD BOWL
LOS ANGELES
SEPTEMBER 10

Throughout this Saturday night show, during a weekend of three sold-out appearances at the Bowl, **Jeff Lynne** and his **Electric Light Orchestra**'s

Explosions in Missoula

Matt Riley

performance was as whimsical as it was precise, as carefully curated as it was magical. Yet, for all the nostalgic nods to the 1970s zenith of the group's career, and there were plenty, maybe the most poignant moment came from an unexpected place.

Ostensibly in support of last year's *Alone in the Universe*, the trio of Los Angeles shows marked three of only five U.S. dates this year (the other two in New York City). More a Lynne/ELO event than a tour stop, the evening was meticulously presented, opening with a short program of classical works. Led by conductor **Thomas Wilkins**, the **Hollywood Bowl Orchestra** acknowledged ELO's unique marriage of rock and symphony in its choice of compositions before Lynne and his ensemble of 12 joined them.

The Bowl acted as a player as well. Cosmic projections swirled on its famed whitewashed arch and flanking light towers. The audience became a canvas for prisms of multicolored laser beams cutting through dry ice fog and dancing in the surrounding trees. A rundown of ELO standards came early and often, with "Evil Woman" slotted as the show's second entry. For his part, Lynne stayed politely brief and appreciative, speaking only a few times between the barrage of hits.

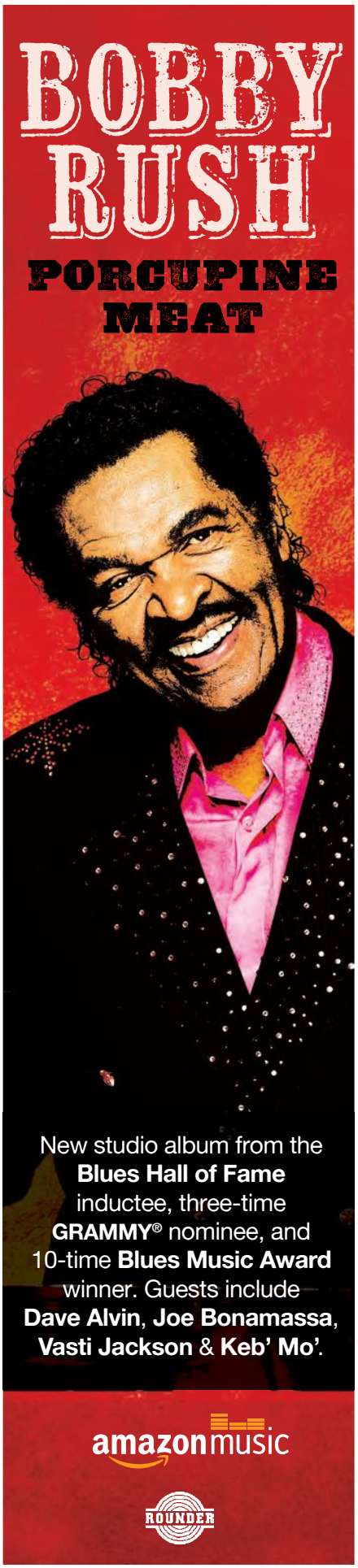
His timeless voice, buttressed by a trio of singers, including his daughter **Laura**, carried the indelible melodies and falsetto peaks on "Showdown" and "All Over the World." Violinist **Rosie Langley** stepped into the light for FM staple "Livin' Thing," before a trip forward to the lone *Alone in the Universe* cut, "When I Was a Boy." With a simple spinning 45 as his backdrop, Lynne's touching autobiographical ballad raised as many cellphone cameras as classics like "Sweet Talkin' Woman," "Turn to Stone" and "Telephone Line," the first of which featured the classically quirky a¸ected vocal of longtime keyboardist **Richard Tandy**.

There wasn't much missing. "10538 Overture," from the group's 1971 debut, anchored the show's midpoint, and the celebratory duo of "Don't Bring Me Down" and "Mr. Blue Sky" closed Lynne's set. After a group selfie, the show went into sensory overload. Lasers and streams of light flooded the stage and crowd, as twirling white sparklers spun and crackled above the Bowl's façade. Flares of fireworks shot into the clear late-summer darkness, while the multitude of musicians rocked an encore of Chuck Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven."

Clearly, this was a performance conceived, designed and executed to dazzle and delight. Every visual had purpose, connected to each lyric and symphonic nuance of Lynne's brilliant catalog. Still, in all its theatrics, the show never once lost sight of that English boy who, decades ago, wanted only to play music. ***Larson Sutton***

Je˜ Lynne dazzles and delights with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra

Mathew Imaging



TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND

TALKING STICK RESORT SCOTTSDALE, ARIZ. SEPTEMBER 2

Although **Tedeschi Trucks Band** played poolside at Scottsdale, Ariz.'s Talking Stick Resort, the sheer intensity and immensity of what was happening onstage during their nearly two-hour set muted any cooling effects.

Popping horn fills, swirly organ jaunts, trilling flutes, lush background vocals, bottom-dropping bass runs, flurries of percussive madness and, of course, blistering guitar solos by both band namesakes continuously hit new musical highs. The group's ability to transcend (maybe bend) time and space into something altogether passionate, exciting and fresh, seemingly at will, never ceased. Clearly, they enjoyed it as much as the crowd.

Opening with "Anyhow," the sweet introduction to *Let Me Get By*, the band's latest album, **Susan Tedeschi**'s soulful yearning—surrounded by silky harmony vocals, understated horns and the first of many gripping **Derek Trucks** solos—briefly cut through the burning desert sun. The audience's gentle sway simulated a refreshing breeze. However, "Let Me Get By" and "Don't Know What It Means" took the heat index to 11.

Trucks' slide magic introduced "Bound for Glory," before the bluesy number swelled thanks to an organ solo, jazzy horn riffs and smooth harmonies. "Right on Time" offered a shifting, old-timey New Orleans ragtime romp featuring **Mike Mattison** on lead vocals. The horn-laden tune popped and segued perfectly into "Get Out My Life, Woman" by New Orleans legend Allen Toussaint. Gritty vocals and stinging guitar leads by Tedeschi turned this funk classic into another sizzling send-up.

It was the first of six covers, each morphing under the TTB spell. Elmore James' classic "The Sky Is Crying" proved a perfect outlet for Trucks' slide guitar escapades. Yet, it was here that Tedeschi showed her own hefty chops as the pair traded scorching solos (and smiles).

George Jones' "Color of the Blues" was a honky-tonk change of pace, while The Box Tops' "The Letter" featured Tedeschi channeling Joe Cocker and belting out the eternally hopeful lyrics between Trucks' fuzz-toned, almost metal-ish solos.

No one was allowed in the pool. Instead, the audience sweated it out through Bobby "Blue" Bland's "I Pity the Fool," a vintage R&B/blues number that bounced with gospel fervor. It was a fitting song for TTB to adopt—their the horns, lofty organ and choir of background singers combined with Tedeschi's vocal prowess to create a true Southern gospel-tent-revival feeling.

Set-closer "Idle Wind" was the closest nod to Trucks' Allman Brothers lineage. The Southern blues rocker shook the nearby saguaros, and left the crowd sweating for more. An encore of Ray Charles' funky "Let's Go Get Stoned" was a perfect cooldown to a night of musical thrills.

Glenn BurnSilver

HOT BUTTERED RUM

PICKIN' ON THE MIDDLE FORK SALMON, IDAHO AUGUST 23-28

To some, it may seem crazy: a weeklong, guided rafting trip with a band and its fans along the Middle Fork of Idaho's Salmon River. When **Dustin Aherin**, the man behind Idaho River Adventures, first hatched these annual outings in 2013, he booked The Infamous Stringdusters. During the seasons since, the Dusters have returned, and new artists, from Cabinet to Larry Keel, have played excursions of their own. California's **Hot Buttered Rum** has brought its feel-good bluegrass to the river twice, although this past run, August 23-28, was the quintet's first time with **Zebulon Bowles** on fiddle and **Shane Schlick** on drums.

Arizona heat acceleration

Butter fans were treated to six intimate concerts. The 19 guests convened in scenic Stanley, Idaho, for a meet-and-greet orientation with Aherin, and then everyone flew in a Cessna 208 Caravan to the drop-in point. There, six guides waited with the boats, gear and instruments, including **Bryan Horne**'s stand-up bass, packed into the largest dry bag imaginable.

The first night, after sharing several bottles, Butter kicked off heir set with an appropriate take on Ralph Stanley's "Red Wicked Wine." Just a few months after the release of their three-EP set *The Kite and the Key*, Butter's song list drew mostly from those tracks, several of which are Stanley covers. Their originals—"Desert Rat," "Idaho Pines," "Middle Country Stars"—spoke to the band's affinity for the outdoors. Older tunes ("California King," most of *Limbs Akimbo*) and a variety of covers, from The Beatles to Prince, also peppered the informal sets, often with ad-libbed lyrics documenting day-to-day happenings. (A favorite was multi-instrumentalist **Erik Yates**' ode to the trip's latrine set to Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues.")

Quickly, passengers settled into a routine: Float through pristine, mountainous wilderness; fly fish; visit backcountry hot springs, historic landmarks or Native American petroglyphs; lunch; raft some more; and settle into camp. On day four, Hot Buttered Rum treated fans to a more formal show in Rattlesnake Cave, which guitarist **Nat Keefe** aptly described as "a real power spot." For the most part, though, the music came after dinner, as whiskey bottles were passed from hand to hand. The quintet also used to the intimate trip to openly discuss their songwriting process and share the stories behind some true crowd favorites, from "Jack Mormon Mom" to "Butch & Peggy."

The final night, after a guide requested a fi ting cover of the Béla Fleck staple "Big Country," the rest of the booze came out and the last hurrah commenced as a wildfire burned in the distance. With the Milky Way filling the sky and a portable disco ball illuminating the canyon walls, everyone sang along to the trip's official anthem, "Guns or Butter," emphasizing its refrain, "Less guns, more Butter!"

Kiran Herbert

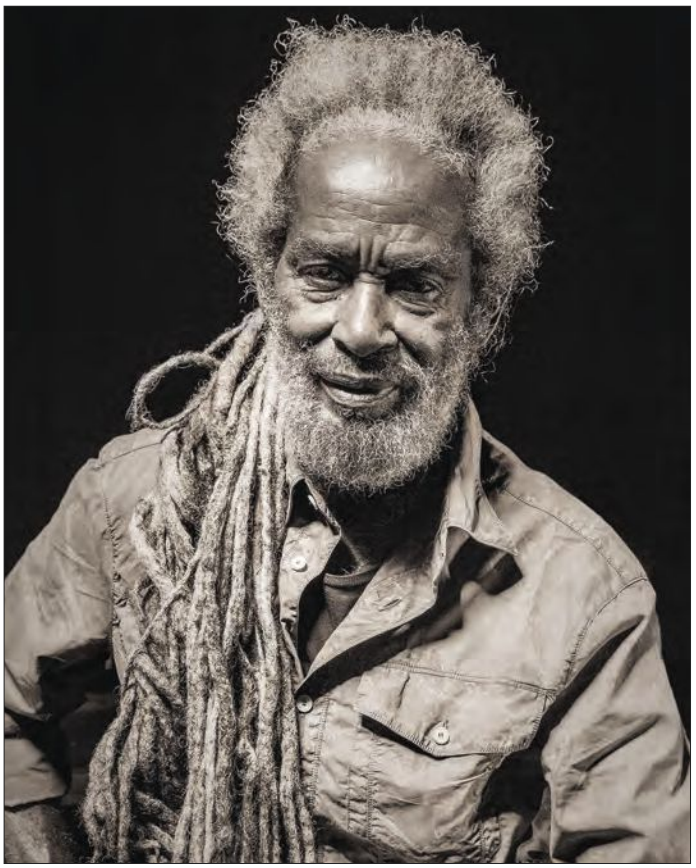
Greetings from Rattlesnake Cave

Fred Kuhlman, Robb Hirsch

Still Living in the *Horror Zone*

Reggae veteran Max Romeo recaptures his Black Ark prime 40 years after the *War ina Babylon*.

BY J. POET



FORTY YEARS ago, Max Romeo released *War ina Babylon*, one of the best roots-reggae albums ever made. Lee "Scratch" Perry, the man who helped invent dub and possibly the greatest reggae producer of the 1970s, sat at the helm for the record. Romeo had worked with Perry before, but *War ina Babylon* was a quantum leap in creativity for both men.

Romeo got his start writing love songs. When the BBC banned "Wet Dream" for its suggestive lyrics, the censorship backfi ed, making the tune a hit and one of the singles that introduced Britain to reggae. After a spiritual awakening, Romeo turned his attention to the social problems plaguing Jamaica. He grew up homeless, and those experiences informed his music. "My childhood was very hard, but I knew I had no choice but to survive," he says. "I grew up among the daily horrors and nightly pestilence on the streets of Kingston. I didn't go to school, so I have to credit those hard days on the streets for everything I know and believe in."

His conscious music became so popular that Jamaica's People's National Party adopted "Let the Power Fall" as the theme song for their 1972 election campaign. The success of that song led to collaborations with Lee Perry, culminating in *War ina Babylon*. Romeo wrote the lyrics in a creative frenzy and recorded the songs quickly. The Upsetters, Perry's ace studio players, created grooves that lifted the songs to new levels of intensity. One number, "Chase the Devil," may be the most sampled track in reggae music.

Twenty-one albums and almost a hundred singles later, Romeo is still performing and making albums but, until now, nothing has captured the smoldering power of *War ina Babylon*. *Horror Zone*, his new album with producer Daniel Boyle, updates the Black Ark sound with another collection of conscious lyrics and dub-heavy grooves.

"I met Lee Perry a few years ago," Boyle says, explaining the album's genesis. "I asked what he thought about reassembling his Black Ark studio in London to make some new music. He thought it was a great idea, so we tracked down some equipment from the '70s. Not the exact stuff from Black Ark, but the same mics, mixing boards and Fisher SpaceXpander spring reverb he used. Then we plugged them into a modern digital studio. As we worked together, he taught me a lot about production." Their fir t collaboration, *Back on the Controls*, nabbed a Grammy nomination for Best Reggae Album.

"The success of the Lee Perry album got me thinking about *War ina Babylon*, one of my favorite records. If I assembled some of the same people who made that album, then maybe we could rekindle the sound and feel of that record. I produced a song for Max a few years ago, so I asked him if he'd be willing to make an album." Romeo was enthusiastic. "[Daniel and I] worked on a song in Jamaica at my house in 2012," he says. "When he contacted me and said he was interested in collaborating on an album that would recreate the '70s feel of reggae music, I couldn't say no. He had recently worked with Lee 'Scratch' Perry, so I agreed."

Boyle assembled a team at his Rolling Lion Studio that included three members of Perry's Upsetters: trombonist Vin Gordon, who also played in the Studio One house band, keyboardist Robbie Lyn and saxophonist Glen DaCosta, from the Upsetters and Bob Marley's Wailers. "We recorded the basic tracks with the Rolling Lion Studio band and sent them to Max. He had some ideas about the direction he wanted to go in, then he flew ver to London to do his vocals and write the lyrics," Boyle says.

Romeo didn't overthink the process. "I work fast. It took me about one week to write the lyrics. All of the songs were written in the studio, listening to the tracks. It was easy and came rather natural," he says. Boyle rearranged the songs to fit the lyric . After tweaking the melodies a bit, he brought in a few more session players, including Lee Perry, who added percussion, backing vocals and dub effect . The result is eight new songs and eight Perry-inspired dub tracks that Boyle mixed live in the studio.

Romeo's voice still has its full range and projects the same soul and suffering that made *War ina Babylon* so powerful. The dub-heavy, polyrhythmic groove of "What If" supports Romeo's matter-of-fact vocal, addressing climate change, poverty and mortality, while "What Is Life" rides a light, skittering groove behind Romeo's description of hunger and starvation in the ghetto. "Cigarett" is an anti-smoking statement with a bright rhythms and a few humorous twists. Romeo suggests, "Instead of smoking... use your lips for a little kiss." Like *Babylon*, the music on *Horror Zone* is uplifting, almost sunny, while Romeo's vocals strike a fine balance bet een hope and apprehension. It's the same contrast that made *War ina Babylon* so compelling.

"Max had total control over all the songs he wrote and the direction of the lyrics," Boyle says. "He is known for his social commentary and focusing on what's going on around him. It's a heavy title for an album, but as Max told me in the studio, 'We as a human race *are* living in a horror zone.'" R

Jason Miller

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

Stephanie LaFera (Kaskade's Manager), Kaskade and Jason Miller (l-r)

"I BELIEVE THAT MUSIC IS the great equalizer," explains Live Nation New York President Jason Miller. "It's the only thing on the planet that everybody has in common. I believe that if a person goes to a concert and has a great time, they can be a better human being than they were when they got there—and that's my responsibility."

Miller can trace this sense of obligation back to when he was a student at the University of Oregon. "[This applies] to artists as well, because you're being given the opportunity to exploit an artist's name and likeness within a certain market," he continues. "They're counting on you to make them look good and sound good and foster their career in a certain manner and, when you think about it, that's an awesome responsibility."

You started booking music in college. How did you enter that world?

I answered a classified ad in my college newspaper at the University of Oregon for a job with an organization called the EMU. There were diffe ent student coordinators, including somebody who did national concerts. I thought that sounded cool and I applied. I had to interview with 25 other people. After I had been there for a year and did a decent job, they kept me around, but I had to go through the same process.

I was on the front wave of the fir t generation of jambands. I brought Phish to the WOW Hall on April 4, 1991. I brought Blues Traveler to Oregon for the fir t time, and worked with Widespread Panic and many other bands. One of the last shows I did before I graduated was with Phish at the Hilton Ballroom on Earth Day '92.

How did you transition into the music industry after you graduated?

I ended up moving to Vancouver and joined MCA Concerts. I worked for Jay Marciano. Today he is the head of AEG Live, but he started with this company in Canada. They were active in Toronto, Vancouver and in between, but they were going to break into Portland, Seattle and Eugene, and places like that. The fir t thing they did was book a show at a little venue in Portland that no longer exists called the Portland Underground with the Smashing Pumpkins. The booking agent at CAA for Smashing Pumpkins, who was a friend of mine, had said to the MCA folks, "You should talk to this kid I worked with in Eugene. He's very bright—he can work on all the stuff for you that's under the radar." They wanted to do this show and come into the market without making a lot of waves. I had everything handled and we sold out the show and it was a big success.

That led to another conversation, and I drove up from Eugene to Tacoma, where I met Jay Marciano and some other folks. The conversation went from, "We'll touch base in September" to "I'm going to send you a plane ticket to Toronto next week. I'd like to meet with you more formally in our Toronto offi ." Then we had a great meeting that manifested into a job opportunity in Vancouver, which was challenging because I was an American moving into a city and a country that I had never lived in before. I was trying to make my way in the world and it was a hard path, but it was ultimately a good one.

What was an early lesson that you learned in your career?

Two of the most important ingredients for success in the live music business are passion for music and attention to detail—paying attention to the details and on the day of a show living up to whatever you had said to an artist or agent or manager in advance.

I remember one time that I worked with a great indie band called Cub. We agreed that the tickets at the door of the show would be $9, and I think I charged $10 because it was easier from a transaction point of view. But that's not what we agreed to—and they were really upset about it and I handed everybody a dollar back on the way out. I stood at the front door and handed out loonies, which are Canadian dollar coins. That was tough and it was a good lesson.

Talk about how you came to work for Live Nation.

After working as a promoter, in 1997, I left to go work for Blues Traveler. Dave Frey, their manager at the time, was running H.O.R.D.E. and he was at the point where he needed to make a decision—either be the manager of the band and have somebody run this festival day to day, or focus on this festival and give up being the manager of the band. So I moved to New York to become the general manager of H.O.R.D.E. I joined them in '97. We had Neil Young & Crazy Horse, Morphine, Primus, Beck, Wilco, Sheryl Crow and all kinds of bands on that tour that year. In '98, I helped set up the tour and cut the deals for Blues Traveler and Ben Harper.

It wasn't too long after when my old boss called me up and said, "We never should've let you leave. We need you back, but we don't need you in Canada. We could really use you in Denver." Then, Dave told me they were talking about selling the festival to Delsener/Slater, so I thought, "OK, there's the evil I know and the evil I don't know." I decided on Colorado where I worked for House of Blues Concerts.

The competition was fie ce with Chuck Morris, Don Strasburg and Brent Fedrizzi, who had over 100 years of experience between them, but they were my friends and I admire them to this day. Chuck Morris was instrumental in getting me on Live Nation's radar. At the time, Charlie Walker—who was running Live Nation—hired me to come work for him.

I joined Live Nation in the spring of 2006, about six months before they bought House of Blues, so that was great timing for me. I was living in Los Angeles but booking concerts in Denver, and that made little sense, so I moved back to Denver. Eventually, I made the move to New York in December 2007, and I've been here ever since.

Doobie Decibel System

Sounds of the New San Francisco Scene

"Our story is really fundamental to *Relix*," says Roger McNamee, reflecting on the formation of Doobie Decibel System. "Those of us who live in the Bay Area are blessed to have venues by Bob Weir and Phil Lesh. San Francisco hadn't been interested in up-and-coming bands for a long time, but Sweetwater and Terrapin Crossroads completely changed that through 'friends nights'—improvisational evenings featuring diffe ent people from the local scene."

It was in this context that McNamee fir t met Jason Crosby (Assembly of Dust, Robert Randolph, God Street Wine, Lesh, Weir), who had recently relocated from the East Coast. McNamee invited Crosby to sit in with Moonalice at Sweetwater. This, in turn, led Crosby to McNamee's house, where the pair shared a revelatory moment after they opened a book of Beatles sheet music and arbitrarily performed "Two of Us."

"Now, keep in mind that my wife [Ann] has a Ph.D. in music theory—she's a retired college professor," McNamee explains. "We're playing out on the porch, and she peeks her head out and says, 'Is that you guys? More like that, please.' So Jason flips the book randomly to 'Dig a Pony,' and she comes back fi e minutes later and tells us, 'Guys, you need to record this. You need to hear what's going on.' What she had noticed was there was something about the pairing of my voice with Jason's, where we create this harmonic resonance where your ear hears this third part. At this point, we were 20 minutes into never having played together as a duo before."

That casual porch session led to a new, more formal musical partnership. Their name, a riff on the library classification sy tem, was Crosby's own term for the method he employs to keep track of the songs he performs with so many diffe ent acts.

The pair hit an early snag after McNamee received an irate call from The Doobie Brothers manager, who claimed trademark infringement (a questionable assertion, as the legal standard is whether a competing name "causes confusion, deception or mistake"). However, the musicians reconciled at Lockn' 2015 after Doobie Brothers co-founder Tom Johnston offe ed what McNamee characterizes as the "nicest apology I've ever received in my entire life."

While Doobie Decibel System began as a two-piece, the group performed at this year's Lockn' as a quintet, with ALO guitarist Lebo, longtime Weir drummer Jay Lane and Bay Area mainstay and multi-instrumentalist Pete Sears. (DDS also gigs as a trio with Lebo.) The band's shows are archived on its robust website and, as McNamee notes, in all three iterations, "tight harmony is an essential part of what we do. The fundamentally acoustic foundation of the music is quite distinct from Moonalice, which is pretty clearly a jamband. This is where I say I am not worthy with respect to my dear friends Phil Lesh and Bob Weir. The thing they have created has empowered a lot of musicians and created an audience who are open to this fl w of music." ***Dean Budnick***

The Marcus King Band

Soulshine: The Next Generation

A haunting urgency has forever inhabited the blues and its messengers, tracing all the way back to Robert Johnson and his 1937 masterpiece "Hellhound on My Trail." For Marcus King, a 20-year-old guitar slinger from Greenville, S.C., the urge was undeniable. "I have always had this notion that I wasn't going to be around long enough to say everything that I needed to say, to leave my stamp on this crazy earth," says King, while driving to his next performance with The Marcus King Band.

Three years ago, King committed fully to the dream: He skipped his junior prom in favor of a gig, then withdrew from high school, collected his GED and hit the road hard. King played relentlessly, "getting a foot in any door I could find a c ack," he says, and released his debut, *Soul Insight*, in 2015.

King's hero-turned-friend and mentor, Warren Haynes, took notice and released *Soul Insight* on his Evil Teen Records. The two shared a common Carolina heritage—Haynes is from the neighboring city of Asheville, N.C.—and bonded after King sat in with Haynes on a cover of ZZ Top's "Jesus Just Left Chicago" at a show in Athens, Ga. This year, when King signed with Concord Music and its Fantasy Records imprint, he tapped Haynes to produce his eponymous fir t album for the label.

Their sessions at Stamford, Conn.'s Carriage House Studios commenced in the dead of the New England winter, keeping everyone inside, King says, and contributing to the album's overall warm aesthetic. The extended stint with Haynes also gave King the opportunity to hone his writing.

"We had a great time making it. It was all strong stuff," says Haynes. "We had the good problem of having too much stuff to choose f om."

Together, they winnowed the band's road-tested repertoire down to 18 cuts to choose from, until an unexpected request came from Concord executive Joe McEwen. "He said, 'I want to hear what's on your mind right now. Write me two songs,'" King recalls, also describing Haynes as respectfully suggestive in the studio. "I really dug that motivational tactic."

The resulting pair of tracks—"Rita Is Gone" and "Radio Soldier"—made the record, and another challenge was conquered. "I am always trying to get better than I was the day before," King says.

The six-piece group will continue to tour heavily in support of their new album, though Kings says each show breathes on its own. He also still forgoes setlists, preferring to gauge the temperature of his audiences from song to song.

As for that proverbial trailing hellhound at this bright of a moment?

"I've seen a lot of hard things. I've seen a lot of difficult thin ," says King. "Age is pretty irrelevant in the things that I've had to deal with, and this is the way I want to express that emotionally."

Larson Sutton

Jacob Blickenstaff (Marcus King)

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Kaleo MOSFELLSBÆR, ICELAND

ICELANDIC DELTA BLUES

Much of the music from Iceland's **Kaleo** is imbued with the spirit of 20th-century America, whether it's the Delta blues or the classic rock of the '60s and '70s. Lead vocalist and songwriter **JJ Julius Son** has a simple explanation for that—it's the music he grew up on. But his interest in the indigenous music of the United States isn't just a passing fancy. "I do my research when I'm inspired by something," he says. "So I've really dug my way through the Delta blues, the Alan Lomax stuff, early recordings from the '30s." The band, which moved to Austin early last year after signing with Atlantic Records, still has a deep connection to their roots in Iceland, where they quickly rose to fame after forming in 2012, with multiple No. 1 hits and a gold record. "We have long winters there—very dark—and then we have beautiful summers, which have daylight 24 hours a day," Julius Son says. "So you're kind of inspired by the nature and everything that the country has to offe ." The singer is also careful to note the currently booming music scene in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik, but says that Kaleo are excited to build their name outside their home country. "Back home, everyone who comes out to the show usually knows every song," Julius Son says. "But we're seeing that more here as well, so it's fun. You get to prove yourself in a new market and keep growing."

officialkaleo.com ***Matt Inman***

Corbu BROOKLYN, N.Y.

A KALEIDOSCOPIC SPACE ODYSSEY

Although **Corbu** lead singer **Jonathan Graves** lives a grounded existence as a grade-school music teacher in Brooklyn, his musical life and perspective can only be described as out of this world. Earlier this year, the psychedelic-rock act dropped their debut album, *Crayon Soul*—a set crafted with the help of Abie Sieford and famed Flaming Lips producer Dave Fridmann—which was inspired by old NASA space photos from the 1970s and, in Graves' own words, "watching the end scene of *2001* over and over again." Musically, Corbu takes cues from Tame Impala with their head-nodding, cerebral, psychedelic guitar drones, while borrowing from Animal Collective's expansive instrumentation. Tracks like the sublime "Branches" build to electronic crescendos that hit an apex with static noise and the hushed voice of Graves' bandmate and collaborator, **Amanda Scott**. Like his influence , Graves takes pride in enticing the senses and sonically time-traveling with his audience. "I have found, when I can get back the openness of childhood, creativity just fl ws like it won't do at other times," he says. "It's not something I think about consciously, but it's much more rewarding to bring yourself back to that place."

corbucorbu.com ***Samuel Fanburg***

Alexandra Valenti (Kaleo)

Highasakite OSLO, NORWAY

SYNTH-POP GLOBAL COMMENTARY

"It was a bit of an angry time for me" says soft-spoken **Ingrid Helene Håvik** of the Norwegian fi e-piece band **Highasakite** about her mindset when writing their latest album, *Camp Echo*. Her frustration about the state of the world is palpable. While listening to a synth-pop album named after one of the seven detention camps within Guantanamo Bay, you can hear the despair and conviction in her spine-chilling vocals. The fir t track, "My Name Is Liar," hits hard, quoting parts of George W. Bush's notorious "War on Terror" speech, while later songs "I Am My Own Disease" and "My Mind Is a Bad Neighborhood" carry on the story with references to ex-Marine Grant Collins' testimony on brutal civilian killings in the Iraq War. "Most of the songs are a bit aggressive," Håvik admits, but the album is also sprinkled with tender moments about her own battles. "God Don't Leave Me" recounts loneliness and the sense of hopelessness she has experienced in this post-9/11 world. Håvik formed Highasakite with drummer **Trond Bersu** in 2011 after the duo met while studying at the Trondheim Jazz Conservatory, and the group's lineup grew to include current members **Marte Eberson** and **Øystein Skar** (synthesizers and keyboards) and **Kristoffer Lo** (guitar, percussion and flugabone). They quickly truck a chord with fans in their native Norway and continued to refine their message as they tou ed internationally, including a run with Of Monsters and Men. "I write about what I see," Håvik says of her agenda. "I reflect upon wha 's going on in the world today." highasakite.no ***Sterling Shore***

Pinegrove MONTCLAIR, N.J.

THE SOUND OF SETTING

On their major-label debut, this year's *Cardinal*, **Pinegrove** present intimate snapshots of a range of relationships, from platonic to romantic, crafting rolling melodies that inhabit subtle, guitar-driven songs. The band's buzzy rise to stardom has been fueled by glowing reviews in top music blogs and two national tours this year—the fir t such excursions for the New Jersey-based collective. And although Pinegrove are still cutting their teeth in the increasingly bright spotlight, **Evan Stephens Hall**, frontman and primary songwriter for the group, speaks with the presence of mind more frequently found in a veteran musician. *Cardinal*'s personal songs are rooted in a specific space and settin , but Pinegrove's message is universal. "One of the fir t things I try to do when I'm figuring out what a song is about is to conjure specifically whe e the song is happening and what salient details there are, like, 'What did it feel like to be there?'" Hall says. "If I can visit that place in my imagination, then usually the lyrics quickly follow." His approach to songwriting is honed yet exploratory, resulting in songs that appear unassuming at fir t glance and bring the listener into a surprisingly deep well of introspection. "It's a pretty nebulous process," Hall says of his evolving craft. "And the only consistent thing is trying to listen as earnestly and honestly as possible to what the song is apparently trying to say."
pinegrove.bandcamp.com ***Matt Inman***

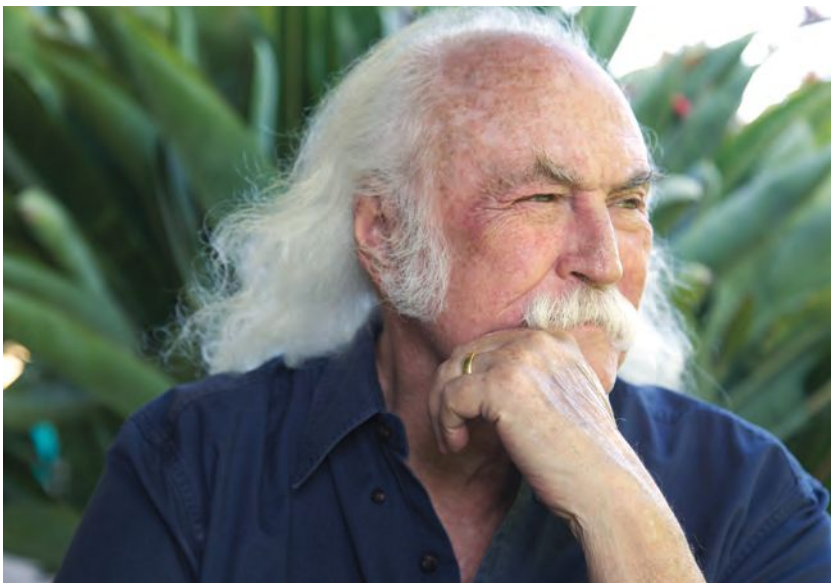
Residual Kid AUSTIN, TEXAS

ROCK-AND-ROLL HIGH-SCHOOL GRADS

"It's so surreal, it hasn't sunk in yet," **Residual Kid**'s **Deven Ivy** says with a sense of amazement. Ivy isn't talking about leading his Austin, Texas-based trio to standout gigs at South by Southwest, CMJ or festivals all across the world. He's talking about graduating from high school, which Ivy did just prior to speaking to *Relix* this spring. Ivy, along with brother-duo **Ben** and **Max Redman**, are the next phenomenon from one of rock-and-roll's most fertile breeding grounds. Ivy says he met Ben while at a "rock camp type thing" when Ivy was 11. "They paired us together because we both liked Nirvana," the guitarist recalls. "The fir t few gigs were rough, obviously," Ivy recalls of eventually teaming up with Max and previous member Grace London, who departed the band shortly after the release of their 2011 EP, *Box*. But Ivy and the Redmans found their stride, overpowering the Austin music scene thanks to their latest EP, *Salsa*. "I'd say a level of weird angst," Ivy says when asked to describe what people love about Residual Kid's infectious rock-and-roll sound. "I've jammed with a lot of people," he adds. "But there's chemistry between us and it's really cool. I like it."
residualkid.com ***Rob Slater***

David Crosby

With CSN in the rearview mirror, Croz cruises ahead with a pair of solo albums and a fresh, new outlook. BY MIKE GREENHAUS



Henry Diltz

PUPPY LOVE

Somebody turned me on to a Snarky Puppy YouTube video, and I started tweeting about them. They're a terrific band. [Snarky Puppy bassist and leader Michael League] got ahold of me and asked if I would do their benefit ecord series, *Family Dinner*, and I said, "Hell, yes!" I spent a week with them in New Orleans and had such a blast. They're totally my kind of musicians—they're way off the deep end in l ve with the music, and it's really the only thing that matters to them other than their families.

So I invited Michael to come to my house so we could try writing together and we came up with three songs in three days. Admittedly, I had some music stacked up that I had been working on for a year, but I was stunned. When we saw how easy it went down, we immediately knew that we were making a record and that became *Lighthouse*. Michael produced it and brought in a brilliant engineer named Fabrice Dupont. They worked drastically fast. We wrote the album together and recorded it in 16 days. It wasn't that there was a sense of urgency, it's just that nothing took very long to accomplish—no drama, no egos, no agenda. He's a very good writer. He has confidence in himself. It was about serving the songs—fast, clean and joyous.

TWENTY YEARS LATER

Michael's a very good communicator. He'll play you something and, if you try to take it a little step further, he's really open about it. He's not afraid to express his opinions very strongly, but he's not locked into anything either. He just wants it to be the best it can be. The only other person I can write with like that is my son James Raymond. He and I wrote [my 2014 record] *Croz*, and we have another record, *Home Free*, that's coming out next year. It's strange—most people my age have teetered out. They don't really have the urgent feel to write—they are very lazy about it or they feel like they have already said what they've got to say. They generally don't write like this, but I'm having the densest, longest, richest surge of writing I can remember ever having. I hadn't released an album in 20 years before *Croz,* and now I'll have three records within a few years of each other, which is quite unusual. It's because I'm very happy. My family is good; my life is good. I know exactly what I want to do and I'm having a blast doing it.

REALLY GOOD WORDS

Michael really liked my fir t record, *If I Could Only Remember My Name*. He liked the words, he liked the vocal stacks and he loved the acoustic guitars. When we got together to make *Lighthouse*, I thought we were going to use his big band and all those great players and make a band record. But he said, "I'd really like to make a mostly acoustic record with just guitar, some bass, big vocal stacks and really good words." I said, "That's right in my wheelhouse. I'm all for it." Michael's in a jazz band, but he listens to music from all over the world. Musicians call him a "wide-head." I think, in that sense, we're very similar.

#OPINIONS

I have a lot of fun on Twitter, but I don't do it the way other people do. I'm not "hashtag this and hashtag that." I talk to people just the way I talk to you. I like communicating with people. So Twitter is fun for me, but I do get in trouble there. Saying that Kanye West is a complete poser and hasn't got any talent at all got me in a lot of trouble. Saying that Trump was a walking intelligent-free zone got me in trouble, too. It's OK—everyone knows I'm an opinionated guy, so I just go on. *[Ed. Note: Crosby has also quibbled with his former Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young bandmates on Twitter and in the press recently. When asked if he has any plans to work with the group in the coming years, Crosby answered with a short, definitiv , "No."]*

TRIUMPHS AND TRUMPS

It's just a coincidence that *Lighthouse* is coming out right before the election, but I have strong feelings about the shape America's in right now. It's a nightmare that that son of a bitch could even get to be a candidate. But this record isn't based around that or a reaction to that—it's independent of all that crap. I think the thing that ties all three of these new records together is the quality of the songwriting. I write by myself, but I also write with other people because it increases the number of colors you have to paint with. The quality of the songs on these records is pretty high. That's a bit modest of me to say, but it ties them together. [*Laughs*.]

CROSBY & SON

My son James is a terrific producer and a fantastic writer. We have almost all of *Home Free* already cut—it's a band record. It's a very good feeling and I'm extremely grateful that the songs are coming to me. As I said, I don't see that happening to most of my compatriots. They seem to be running out of steam. I've gotten much better at working with other people and widening my scope. That's the big advantage to working with other people—more options, more variables to work with. I'm still writing by myself as well—always have, always will. I'm really enjoying just writing for some reason. I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, I think. I feel very alive.

Me, Myself & I

The Houston singer-songwriter takes on a subject he's intimately familiar with—himself.

BY ROBERT ELLIS

ROBERT ELLIS is the fourth album by Robert Ellis on New West. I've literally been a fan of his since the very beginning. I went on assignment between Dallas and St. Louis and got to chat with Robert Ellis. He is currently on the road in support of *Robert Ellis*.

ROBERT ELLIS: **So Robert, fir t of all, I'm very glad I could come join you on this leg of the tour. I'm a big fan, maybe your biggest. Most of the time, I'm stuck in the offi —I just stare at a blank page for hours. I have crippling anxiety about finishing some 900 word writing project that I've committed to for *Relix*. This is a much needed respite from that terror. Being out here on the road, I just feel free. Do you still find the oad fun? Romantic even?**

ROBERT ELLIS: I still really love it. I'm lucky to get to do what I do. I get excited every time we arrive at a hotel. Me and the band watch *Forensic Files* together and eat pizza. We call it "friendship file ." Other than that, I mostly keep to myself.

ROBERT ELLIS: **You and the guys in your band seem very close. I guess being on the road with people like this makes you really comfortable with one another. I read somewhere that if you stare into another person's eyes and ask these 100 questions, then you will fall in love. Have you ever tried that game with your bandmates?**

ROBERT ELLIS: I haven't formally tried that game. I have heard about it. We sort of play that game because we spend eight hours a day in a van together. We definitely all have a deep connection to one another. You can hear that in the playing on *Robert Ellis*.

ROBERT ELLIS: **So how did you come up with the title for the record? I think it's really great.**

ROBERT ELLIS: It just felt right—something about it. The words were rattling around in my head for months. I just love the sound of it: *Robert Ellis*.

ROBERT ELLIS: **Who are some of your influences on this record? I hear a lot of classic songwriters as well as modern folk/country. Are you a fan of Robert Ellis Orrall?**

ROBERT ELLIS: We get each other's Google alerts. For a while, I was flagging his YouTube videos as spam because mine were harder to find but, ventually, I came around. I really want to write music with him.

ROBERT ELLIS: **So I read somewhere that you're an avid reader. Are you aware of the crime-fiction writer obert Ellis? Is his work an influence?**

ROBERT ELLIS: I am! He is awesome. I actually got him to write the bio for the last record. He is a very nice guy and a great writer. He didn't write the bio for *Robert Ellis*.

ROBERT ELLIS: **On this record, more than others, it seems that you are going deep within for your material. Without having ever met you, I feel that I really know you after listening to the album. Does the Robert Ellis of today draw from personal experience? Is this more or less the case for *Robert Ellis*?**

ROBERT ELLIS: I sort of do both. I use my own experience as a jumping-off point a lot of the time. I like to let the characters and stories go where they want to go, though. I never feel good about holding them to some rigid framework of how things actually happened in my life. That seems really self-involved to me. I just don't want to talk about myself that much.

ROBERT ELLIS: **I read somewhere that, in order to be an artist, you have to have equal parts narcissism and crippling self-doubt. To get up there on that stage, you must think that what you are doing is good in some way. Where do you fall on this spectrum?**

ROBERT ELLIS: I do have a lot of anxiety but I wouldn't really say I'm self-loathing. I really love to perform and I do think the music we are making is good. I find it inte esting, and I want to share that. Sometimes, I just listen to my own music for fun because I really like it, especially *Robert Ellis*! I really like when other people tell me they like the sound of *Robert Ellis*, too.

ROBERT ELLIS: **So, I follow you on Instagram. I can't help but notice that you post a lot of selfie . I have to admit—I have a little crush. I thought about direct messaging you a few times but never worked up the nerve. Have you ever gone on a date through an internet connection?**

ROBERT ELLIS: *Aww!* I have to admit: I was lurking around your Instagram as well. You might have noticed I liked a photo of you in a bathing suit from 2012. I have had a few fun nights, thanks to the internet. One time, I posted a Craigslist "Missed Connection." I danced with this girl all night and then lost her somehow. I never got a response.

ROBERT ELLIS: **That's so sad! You don't deserve that...I mean, you are so cool and nice and charming! You should find her and send her a copy of *Robert Ellis*.**

Robert Ellis released his self-titled, fourth album on New West in June. The personal collection was written in the wake of his divorce and follows his critically acclaimed records The Lights from the Chemical Plant *and* Photographs.

Slightly Stoopid

SLIGHTLY STOOPID'S summer runs have become a rite of passage, annual caravans known for their creative billings, collaborative feel and all-around celebratory vibes. This year's "Return of the Red Eye" outing kicked off at edmond, Wash.'s Marymoor Park on June 15 and crossed the country through late August, hitting amphitheaters and other large outdoor pavilions with the help of SOJA and, on select dates, Zion I, The Grouch & Eligh, Fortunate Youth and a few other special guests. Since principal members Miles Doughty and Kyle McDonald formed Slightly Stoopid over 20 years ago, the now seven-person outfit has matu ed into one of the most dynamic acts on the summer shed circuit, spiking their original mix of ska and punk with elements of funk, reggae, dub and jam. When he's not out with The Rolling Stones or his own projects Tiny Universe and Greyboy Allstars, saxophonist Karl Denson also joins Slightly Stoopid on the road and in the studio, serving as the group's eighth member and "uncle." The band and their crew documented the West Coast leg of the "Return of the Red Eye" tour, offering a glimpse into their back tage life, onstage theatrics and, of course, favorite herbal refreshments.

Early on, we cruised to Santa Barbara Bowl. J-Wiz's view of the stage from front of house. (Photo by Chris Scott)

Always fun doing our fan meet and greet, meeting Stoopidheads from around the world—even Uncle Don Carlos shows up to meet the fans for a pre-show hang. (Photo by Stephen Lashbrook)

"Everybody wants to get some Sensimilla"—Stoopidheads lightin' up "Fat Spliffs" in end, Ore. (Photo by Bubba Sellers)

Not sure what your junk drawer looks like but... (Photo by Miles Doughty)

Kyle and Jacob, from SOJA, pre-show at the Lake Tahoe Outdoor Arena at Harvey's in Stateline, Nev. (Photo by Gabor Mereg)

"Up on a Plane" live at Irvine Meadows in California.
(Photo by Amanda McCarver)

The tour buses after they rolled into Cuthbert Amphitheater in Eugene, Ore., where nature engulfs the iconic "arch" that sets the tone for the show experience in the friendly confines of ugene.
(Photo by Jon Phillips)

We didn't have time to catch any waves but we did encounter some psychedelic jellyfish. ere's a limited edition Santa Barbara Bowl poster by Dylan Fant.
(Photo by Jon Phillips)

July 4th weekend in Sin City at the Mandalay Bay Beach. *(Photo by Jon Phillips)*

"Fire Shot Madness"—Stoopidheads firing it up one last time for the fina season of the historic Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre, which has been home to us for many summer shows. *(Photo by Matt Corkill)*

Karl Denson in his "Universe"—it's been a great addition to the band having Uncle Karl as an eighth member when he's not on tour with The Rolling Stones. *(Photo by Jeff liskin)*

Crossed back into the Golden State for some California Love, and Stoopidheads filled the G eek Theatre in Berkeley, Calif. *(Photo by Sterling Munksgard)*

"Open Road" crossing the state line from Cali to Nevada—it doesn't suck to wake up in God's country. *(Photo by James Wisner)*

Our first show was in the lush Redwoods of Marymoor Park. It was a great place to kick off " eturn of the Red Eye 2016." *(Photo by Jan Domacena)*

"Return of the Red Eye 2016" kicks off at arymoor Park in Redmond, Wash., marking a decade-long tradition of Slightly Stoopid summer outdoor amphitheater tours. The fans always have it smelling nice in Washington. *(Photo by Jan Domacena)*

Cruisin' on down the interstate and getting deeper into the highly potent mix of Oregon's fields of jo —Miles, reggae legend Don Carlos and Kyle visit a private grow somewhere in the vicinity of Jacksonville, Ore.'s Britt Pavilion. *(Photo by Doug Hac)*

Carl Broemel

BY MATT INMAN

CARL BROEMEL knows how to use his vacation time wisely. While off the clock from his day gig as My Morning Jacket's lead guitarist, Broemel, along with most of his Jacket brethren, spent much of the summer backing Ray LaMontagne on a tour in support of the Jim James-produced *Ouroboros*. On top of that, in August, the Indiana native and Nashville resident released a solo album, *4th of July*, on his new label, Stocks in Asia. But, while he enjoys the challenges of various projects, he's not planning on veering away from his main job anytime soon.

"It's not like I'm trying to escape anything to do it on my own," Broemel says of his non-Jacket effort , while sitting in *Relix*'s Manhattan offices afte taping a video session. "It's just more like, 'Idle hands are the devil's plaything.' Not in a sense of, 'I wish I was *just* doing that,' in any way—it's just that both are helpful to each other."

4th of July is Broemel's third solo album, although he considers it his second. (The fir t was more of a compilation of demos from his days at Indiana University.) His official solo debut *All Birds Say*, arrived back in 2010, and Broemel says this year's follow-up has been brewing for about four years—an understandable length of time considering his other commitments.

"My main priority is my band," Broemel says. "Playing with My Morning Jacket trumps all for me, and this is me just goofing a ound and giving it a shot."

Of course, Broemel's talent is such that his "goofing around" is somebody else's full-time work, and *4th of July* ended up being a solid collection of eight tracks that hints at the ethos of My Morning Jacket but in a more, as Broemel puts it, "singer-songwriter vein." One of the most Jacket-esque tunes on the record is the title track, which spans just over 10 minutes and features a sprawling, noisy, Southern-psychedelic solo in the middle, an illustration of Broemel's goal to stretch out his songs more with this album.

"I made an effort to ma e it interesting, instrumentally," he says. "When we were recording, I decided that instead of me doing my normal thing and having a song that has a very set structure—putting it down and then going, 'Next'—I wanted to try something new. We turned on a drum machine, gave vocal cues to the band and said, 'Let's play this bridge section quieter or this part loud.' Then I went back and actually pieced the song together. So, I definitely feel like I expanded, but it still relates to my last record."

This fall, Broemel is right back on the road for a run of solo dates before Trampled By Turtles' lead vocalist, Dave Simonett, joins him in November. Broemel admits that it's a whole diffe ent animal when he's onstage playing his own stuff, as opposed to backing up others.

"It's really challenging," he says. "One of the best parts of it is the scariest part, which is just going up there and trying to do something somewhat compelling all by yourself. Or, all your new songs—do people react to these at all? Every time I do it, it's kind of like riding a roller coaster when you're a kid. You're like, 'Oh, my God. This is the scariest thing ever,' and then you get off and ou're like, 'I'm so glad I did that.' That's how I approach this."

Broemel wasn't completely alone while working on the album, however. His Jacket bandmates Bo Koster and Tom Blankenship both contributed to the tracks, with Koster co-writing some of them ("He has so many great musical pieces and parts that I was like, 'Ooh, can I steal that?'"). Laura Veirs, wife of producer Tucker Martine, who sat at the helm for the last two Jacket albums, also appears as one of the special guests. "I'm a huge fan of her records, and I've worked on some of her music, so it was sort of a bartering system, like, 'Hey, can I send you a track?'" A similar agreement brought in Neko Case, for whom Broemel had provided a guitar solo on the song "City Swans" from her latest record. One of Broemel's Nashville friends, Shelly Colvin, provides backing vocals, along with Case, for "4th of July."

"It was fun to bring in some other people," says Broemel, who welcomes any sort of collaboration as a vessel for improving and expanding, as with his tour behind LaMontagne. "It's just fun—like a social exercise, just to hang—because I wouldn't necessarily go out and see bands that much when I'm home. But they really helped out a lot."

Broemel sees side-projects as a key element of My Morning Jacket's longevity. "It's helpful, I think, for the fi e of us to go off and do other things and not feel trapped in doing the band. That's enriching. When we come back, it's always very enlightening—like, 'Man, I do *not* want to be in a dressing room by myself at all. I want to be with you guys.' There's a lot of refocusing the energy back in. This year, we did a lot less shows, but they were so much more fun. Quality over quantity."

And, although Broemel seems to have thoroughly enjoyed the whirlwind of activity that 2016 has brought so far, he has some very specific plans for the coming months: "Hopefully," he says, "I'll be drinking scotch by the fi eplace over Christmas break, doing nothing."

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The Felice Brothers

BY JUSTIN JACOBS

IT'S LATE SUMMER in Upstate New York, a hazy day when life moves slower than usual. At his home in the Hudson Valley, Ian Felice has just written a new song. The currently untitled number spins a tale of Donald Trump ordering the songwriter's execution, on high charges of illegal poetry.

That song will almost certainly never see the light of day. But it's not such a far shot from the storytelling that people have come to expect from The Felice Brothers, which has been Ian's vehicle for his hardscrabble American tales of woe and wandering for the past decade.

On June 24, the outfit, whic also includes Ian's brother James on keys and accordion, fiddler G eg Farley, bassist Josh Rawson and new drummer Will Lawrence, released *Life in the Dark* on Yep Roc. The album is The Felice Brothers' 10th full-length release, and the fir t they've self-produced. In nine tunes, The Felice Brothers lay out loose, smoking folk-rock and roots music, barroom rave-up tunes, and stomp-and-spit songs, in which Ian writes of an Old West bandit shooting a judge, a family's tearful dissolution and dancing with "the doll of St. Paul."

Though many modern folk acts sing of dusty roads and small-town balls, most haven't lived it quite like The Felice Brothers. Ian, James and their older half-brother Simone were raised a few exits away from Woodstock, N.Y., "very working class house in the woods. Our father was a carpenter," says James. "I didn't meet a person from a diffe ent country until I was an adult. But we were lucky to have grown up broke in a beautiful place."

As young men, the three brothers began busking in New York City subway stations. Crowds gradually formed, and the Felices realized that they might be on to something. By 2006, they'd released a sparse collection of lo-fi tunes calle *Iantown*, which was essentially an Ian solo album, and made their more official debut wi *Through These Reins and Gone*. Three more albums followed in rapid succession before their self-titled breakthrough in 2008. But the working-class family stayed grounded as a blue-collar band, recording with money on their minds—a decision that came to influence their music

"We didn't have enough money to record our fir t album in a studio. A friend had some equipment, and we found an old, abandoned, beautiful Shakespeare camp upstate. It was leaking. We had to run extension cables 150 yards to the nearest building with electricity. There were no working bathrooms," says James. "That was our fir t experience recording music. We got addicted to that feeling."

The self-made recording spaces helped foster a living, breathing energy in the music, and the band refused to give it up. "A lot of these studios are pretty stale—no windows, no feeling," says Ian. "I like things that are homemade, records that sound rough. I don't like pristine-sounding records."

They recorded albums in a forgotten high-school gym and a converted chicken coop. But the band remains dedicated to their work—and not the artistic kind. Before The Felice Brothers hit the road for a fall *Life in the Dark* tour, James hopes to find some con truction work. "Odd jobs for money," he says. "Moving stuff a ound—I love it, and I'm good at it."

In 2011, The Felice Brothers—minus Simone, who is pursuing a solo career and working in the studio with acts like The Lumineers—released *Celebration, Florida*. The album found the band adding thick layers of howling synthesizers and drum-machine beats into their dark rock-and-roll. Though he calls it their "oft-maligned, misunderstood" album, James and the band loved the experimental, foreboding atmosphere they'd created. Yet, on the road, the songs didn't translate.

"We tried to recreate the vibe of the album—all the synthesizers. But we couldn't get it across. So we started pulling back from that edge," says James. "We learned that we want to make music we can represent live. That's such a huge part of who we are as a band."

If 2014's *Favorite Waitress* was a familiar stylistic retreat, then *Life in the Dark* brings the grit of The Felice Brothers to a gorgeous new place. While Ian had written a handful of new songs in 2014, it wasn't until spring 2015 that the band reassembled in their garage to begin rehearsing. But the demo sessions sounded good; the energy was right. Quickly, practicing turned into recording, with James at the helm as producer.

"I learned how to record music over a weekend, bought a book and got some gear, trying to figu e out Pro Tools," he laughs. "I think I got it."

In less than two months, they finished up *Life in the Dark*—an unexpected surprise. Recorded live, the set is as tuneful and organic as The Felice Brothers have ever sounded, perfect jukebox picks for a whiskey bar or a barn. Ian's bloodied lyrics are disarmingly wrapped, like a gift, in accordion and fiddl - led party music. With "Jack at the Asylum," Ian explores a modern view of America—sometimes beautiful, other times grotesque—singing, "I've seen your pastures of green/ the crack whores, the wars on the silver screen/ Hiroshima and the lynching tree/ it's a wonder my eyes still can see." The whole band joins together, shouting "America! America!" to the rafters, before Ian takes over again with, "You give me nightmares."

For The Felice Brothers, it's all part of one big, exhilarating experiment that keeps on moving—much like the band themselves.

"Our band could only exist today," says James. "We began as complete novices, inexcusably undertrained on our instruments. We could only make music because of how easy and cheap it is now. We may be very folky, but we're a thoroughly modern band."

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Dave Matthews Band at 25

Earlier this year, the Morrison Hotel Gallery in New York City hosted a photo exhibit to commemorate Dave Matthews Band's 25th anniversary. Here's a selection of images from that exhibit, with notes from the photographers.

It had been fi e years since the band had toured in Europe. I got there the day before they kicked off their tour in Lisbon [on Oct. 11, 2015], and you could feel the energy in the air. Portuguese fans are some of the most enthusiastic in the world, and they were all ecstatic for the band's highly anticipated return. The night was on fi e and so was the band. When they returned to the stage for the encore, the audience had lit up the whole place with their cellphones and lighters—you could really tell that Dave was so moved by their overwhelmingly warm welcome. The band rode on that energy throughout the entire European tour. There were many more amazing moments that tour, but that specific moment in Lisbon will always stand out for me. RENÉ HUEMER

The infamous Flood Zone in Richmond, Va.—not air-conditioned. This was taken Aug. 10, 1993 from the balcony. Legend has it that the stage was so old and rotten that one of the band members fell through it during a soundcheck. C. TAYLOR CROTHERS

I was touring with the band in Europe during the summer of 1996. It was a great tour because they were going to so many places that they had never played before. This shot is from Copenhagen, and LeRoi, Dave and Stefan were standing on the street waiting for a taxi to take us somewhere. I can honestly say it was one of those random moments where I thought, "This is something I am gonna remember 20 years from now." SAM ERICKSON

This was during the soundcheck for the *Listener Supported* show at the Continental Airlines Arena [on Sept. 11, 1999]. The band had just walked on stage and were surveying the venue. I love these moments. They leave you wondering what they were talking about and give the viewer a glimpse into history. DANNY CLINCH

This is a huge fan favorite. It's from July 2, 2009, at the Rock Werchter Festival in Werchter, Belgium. I think people like it because it encapsulates Dave's personality, body language—everything—perfectly in one shot. I remember capturing this photograph but really didn't think about it until much later. Sometimes you know immediately you nailed it; sometimes they creep up on you. C. TAYLOR CROTHERS

This was completely Dave's idea. He had been thinking about this for the whole tour. When I showed up, we happened to be in one of the most pigeon-infested places in Europe [Piazza San Marco in Venice, Italy on Feb. 24, 2010]. I had to pay a surly gelato vendor 10 euros for the cones—he was not as amused with our idea as we were. C. TAYLOR CROTHERS

I shot this in Toronto after a day of shooting publicity photos. We had a blast kicking around the city. The show that night had a great energy, and I feel this really captures a peak moment in their performance history where they were firing on all cylinder . DANNY CLINCH

This shot was taken at Electric Lady Studios in early 1998. Dave and Carter were working on vocals for "Pig." There were a couple of harmonies that they were having a hard time hitting. This photo was snapped right at the moment when they had just made a breakthrough with how to sing it. There might have been a slightly off-color joke to lighten the mood but, mostly, this is a picture of a creative breakthrough in real time. SAM ERICKSON

Todd Snider

Eastside Bulldog BY DEAN BUDNICK

"STEVE FISHELL HAS THIS academy, and he had asked me to play in front of his students so that they could learn how to record," Todd Snider explains, while detailing the origins of his new album, *Eastside Bulldog*. "But that didn't happen. We got them drunk and high and we made this album."

The result was an all-night session that extended past dawn, during which Snider and some area players ad-libbed an entire album's worth of material while adopting a new identity, creating songs on the fly that har ened back to the early days of rock.

Snider then sat on the results for a few years. "Every once in a while my manager would say, 'You know, that came out good.' In my mind, I was like, 'How could it? I hardly remember it.' I don't think anyone who was there remembers it. So I wouldn't want to listen to it. But at some point I did, and I thought that I was able to get to an honest place that I don't get to when I try too hard."

He clarifie , in his inimitable style: "My obsession with music started with the alphabet and all that I thought it could bring to music, so when I realized the alphabet was a hoax perpetuated by the Freemasons to trick me into thinking I could make sounds with my face that would improve my life, I was completely at odds with myself and my life's work. All at once, it occurred to me that even Bob Dylan knows that, lyrically, he can't touch "wop-bop-a-loo-bop" or "sh-boom sh-boom" or "shama-lama-ding-dong." Those sounds actually indicate the exasperation of wanting to be loved or understood. I grew up around lyrics like that and, up to that point, had seen them as trite. I grew up around the music of The Kingsmen and Paul Revere & The Raiders. It's sort of in my DNA. I have never been a great guitar player, but I have never stopped working at it either, and I have gotten to where I could play lead in one of those bands.

"So one night—in a fit of self-loathing, after having just finished an EP and an album of word songs, but knowing I thought words, in general, were useless as conveyors of emotions and ideas—it occurred to me how important the word 'baby' was in rock-and-roll and that I only wanted to sing about fucking or fighting or y car or my town and my music. So I decided Todd Snider was dead to me and I would become a guy named Elmo Buzz.

"I wrote a whole backstory on him. He grew up in East Nashville and he formed a band based on his obsession with Bocephus [Hank Williams Jr.] and partying and rocking and just kicking ass in general. The band rehearsed for 12 years before they ever auditioned and, when they finally auditioned, they got the gig. Right when they get the gig, East Nashville is just becoming this Americana-y town, and this Todd Snider character comes into town. At Elmo's fir t gig, he had this hat on with fl wers on it. He was kind of dressed the way I dress now. I saw this guy's band, and I thought, 'They're just terrible. No one's ever going to see these guys,' so I stole his look, thinking, 'Who the fuck would ever know?' I got more popular around town and he eventually realized that I'd stolen his look and he got really angry about that.

"So now there's this band Elmo Buzz & The Eastside Bulldogs who refuse to play anywhere other than East Nashville, and they sing songs about chicks and cars and partying hard. The guy hates me and you never see us in the same place because he told me if I ever saw him, I should run—so I do. He talks shit about me constantly and about how Todd Snider ruined East Nashville with all the fingerpicking and the folk bullshit and the beer song when it used to be a kick-ass, party-hardy rock town.

"Elmo's answer to the question: 'How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?' is 'Stop whining. I'm going to have a good time tonight if it fucking kills me. Are you with me or not? And Todd Snider still walks around acting like Dylan was being deep when he sang all that bullshit.'"

HEY PRETTY BOY

We went out, started playing and the fir t words that came out of my mouth were: "Nobody cares about the music business" because, to me, that's East Nashville. In my mind, as East Nashville got hipper, the music business people would come over and hang out in the

bar, and they would ask you how things were going at work and who your lawyer was, but nobody over there cares about any of that.

The guitar solo—that's me. It's the fir t solo I've ever taken. I play "take-off" guitar on the whole album and being that this is *Relix*, how should I say this? Neal, Derek, Trey [Casal, Trucks, Anastasio]—I hope they're going to be OK. Especially on this one, my use of the one note really shows my lack of talent and dexterity as an expression of soul.

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So now, we had one song and it was time to make up the next one. I just yelled, "Hey, baby, let's rock-and-roll!" You can't say anything better than that. And then I just kept going with that thought, so I sang, "It's alright if you lose control; everybody's trying to get their kicks." Then I yelled out our area code, and to make up a chorus, I just took all those lines and sang them backward.

Then, we just started rocking and Dennis Taylor, who has since passed away but was the sax guy for Delbert [McClinton], took a solo. And then I came in and I played my solo, which I've played for Neal and, when I did, I had to talk him off the top of the hotel for two hours. They asked me, "Please play lead for the band [Hard Working Americans]" but I told them that I couldn't. I was too humble to do that.

To be very serious for a second, my leads are almost comical. They're funnier than "Beer Run." I don't know why I like them, but I'm proud of them and I can't believe I did them in front of people. It makes me want to play guitar.

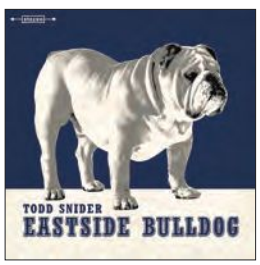
The truth is that, for as bad as I am, I play all goddamn day. I don't have the rhythm to play with my own band—I can do stuff, but I can't do it with the drummer consistently. It really fucks up the live groove if somebody's not locked in.

THE FUNKY TOMATO

So then I thought, now that we're here and we're doing this, we have to have a dance. The very fir t song—it was kind of just a Chuck Berry song, and the second one is a slight variation of "Blue Suede Shoes." Then we do "The Funky Tomato," which is more in the vein of "Wooly Bully" or "She's About a Mover."

It sounds like a 19 year old playing the guitar, and there is something sweet about that kind of guitar playing. I'm glad I can do it. I learned to do it from guys like Dan Baird and [Jason] Isbell and Neal, although maybe not Neal as much. They just showed me those little lead scales. I'd never played lead before. I never left the fir t three frets until a few years ago.

Another part of this album that I'm genuinely proud of is the background stuff, the "whoa"-ing and all that. David [Schools] liked that, so it became something I got to bring back to the boss. Then, on the Hard Working Americans record, he was like, "Just go out there and 'whoa whoa' shit. Do the whole song." He would keep tiny bits of it because he thought I made up some good "whoas" on my Elmo *Eastside Bulldog* record, which was originally called *Shit Sandwich*.



EASTSIDE BULLDOG

I didn't do a solo on this because I thought, "Take it easy, don't hurt 'em, Hammer." When it starts off, I'm just talking about this old car I used to have because I thought that you sing about your car if you're in a kick-ass rock group that plays three-minute songs in the Great Northwest in 1963. I knew that the band was going to be called Eastside Bulldogs and, once I started yelling that over and over, I thought, "My God, this is really cool." Then, the second verse, I just said real quickly about being a burned-out musician and being proud of it. I don't know if I would've said that if I was thinking, but I'm glad I got that out and it feels good to yell it, and to have people yell it with me.

CHECK IT OUT

Once again, I made up the verse on the spot. I said, "This song is better than it sounds." I was trying to project some hope into the idea that this was going to become a song in the next two-and-a-half minutes. And then it did.

It was that blues thing where you say a line and then you say it again, so you've given yourself 20 seconds to think of something else to say. When I said, "My reputation ain't as bad as they say," I didn't even realize it was such a circular, logical, weird thing to say. And then I gave myself 20 seconds to think of something else to say. By that time, I understood what I'd said and thought it was funny. I thought my reputation would be great if you could just see me the way I see myself, so I said, "It would be better than good if you saw it my way."

Then, there's a sax solo, and I don't know what the hell I'm doing on the guitar. I was just hitting notes, flailin . I might not even have been on the right key. I was on the wrong part of the guitar, and the whole time I was thinking, "What am I going to say? What am I going to say?" Then, we came back around and I had done two word tricks in a row, so I was trying to think if there was another one like that, and the best I could come up with in the time I had was, "The way you see it ain't as good as it looks," and then once I started to say that, I was thinking, "There's no way I'm going to think of something that rhymes with looks." But then I opened my mouth and said, "You see me burned out in some library reading your matchbooks." I still don't know what the fuck that means or why that came out, but I thought, "That'll work; it rhymes." I wonder if maybe it does mean something, but not to me. Or maybe it will later as my life goes on.

BOCEPHUS

My thinking was that Bocephus is just something that's fun to yell, especially if you've never heard of him. What a great thing to yell up at the sky or whatever. It just sounds good. So we were just jamming and, all of a sudden, we stopped and I yelled that. Then we did one overdub where everyone else went back in and yelled it when I yelled it, so the song is basically like "Tequila."

I've never met Hank Jr., but I like his music and I try not to listen if they get him to talk about other things. I think his music's funny and I think that my particular genre owes more to him than they give him credit for. When I say his music's funny, I don't mean I'm laughing at it. I think when he wants to be funny, he can be funny. Sometimes he's funny with politics I don't agree with, but I know that I'm doing that to some people, too. He would disagree with me about everything other than the way good country music sounds. I'm really hoping he'll let me make a video with him in it. We don't agree on politics, and it's hard to trust someone when you don't agree on politics, but I wouldn't make him look foolish. I don't need to agree with people to love them.

ARE YOU WITH ME

That's the only cover. A band called the LeRoi Brothers wrote that. The guy's name is Steve Doerr, and I fucked his song up horrificall . I saw it in a bar in Austin in like '88 and, in my mind, I never forgot it. So as we were doing this, I thought, "I'm going to do that one song I heard that one night." I went in and I did it and loved it and thought we did great. Just recently, I found the actual song and I botched the lyrics all the way to fucking hell and left a bridge out, so I hope the guy doesn't hate me.

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

By now, I was thinking about

Continued on page 77

FREE TO BE YOU AND ME

Local Natives throw out the script with their third, highly collaborative LP, *Sunlit Youth*.

BY RYAN REED

Renata Raksha

"THERE IS CERTAINLY AN ego thing that always has existed and continues to exist in this band," says Local Natives singer and co-founder Taylor Rice. "It's this push-and-pull force for everybody. We want to collaborate, and that vibe is great, but you've got strong-headed people who want to get their musical visions across."

Local Natives was founded as a democracy and, indeed, there's an element of politics involved in balancing so many creative forces. The acclaimed indie-rock outfit juggles th ee multi-instrumentalist singer-songwriters—Rice, Kelcey Ayer, Ryan Hahn—with a rhythm section (bassist Nik Ewing, drummer Matt Frazier) that contributes crucially to their emotive, harmony-stacked arrangements.

That sense of healthy competition fueled the band's fir t two albums, 2009's *Gorilla Manor* and 2013's *Hummingbird*—but creative strains lurked underneath, as the songwriters struggled to relinquish their material—to sacrifice their personal visions for a collective one. With their effusi e third LP, *Sunlit Youth*, the quintet faced an even loftier challenge: controlling an artistic detonation. Over a year and a half of writing and recording sessions—spread across Thailand, Nicaragua, Malaysia, Hawaii and their native California—the band wound up with "at least three times the amount of songs" than usual, somewhere between 40 and 50.

"With this record, we've been in a healthy place, in general," Rice says. "When other band members contribute to what we would say are 'our songs,' they become something else and something better. It's what makes a band a band. It's what separates us from being solo artists tacking a bunch of songs together. [Learning to compromise] has been a really healthy growing pain to go through, and it was hard for certain band members to accept at fir t. Once we did, the creativity level really exploded. That came from unleashing people's individual creative potential a little more, while still maintaining that collaborative spirit."

The chief catalyst for this rebirth was a "serendipitous" trip to Thailand toward the end of 2014.

"We were just going where our lives were leading us," Rice admits. "We got this festival offer [for rbanscapes] in Malaysia. We hadn't played there before but wanted to. But we were just digging into writing, and it's a really long flight. ou basically give up a full week to play one day in Malaysia. But I wanted to, and we were trying to justify doing it. And I just remember that, through a friend of a friend, this guy had this amazing studio that he'd built in Thailand. I looked up the flight, and it as about an hour and a half from Kuala Lumpur, so I said, 'What if we justify this by making it this writing trip?' We'd been writing at home in LA a little bit in our studio, but we'd been looking for a place to get out. It just fell into our laps. That Thailand trip kicked things off."

The rejuvenated group spent two weeks in the exotic locale, which sparked the album's two poignant lead singles, "Past Lives" and "Villainy," both sung primarily by Rice. The tracks foreshadow the band's ultimate path: the former a polished, arena-sculpted anthem that explores heady topics like predestination and reincarnation; the latter a resilient electro-rock gut-punch, their fir t-ever to not feature guitar.

"We are a band, and a song doesn't sound like Local Natives until, at some point, we put it through that filte ," Rice says. "But we were excited

"With this record, we've been in a healthy place in general," Rice admits. "When other band members contribute to what we would say are 'our songs,' they become something else and something better. It's what makes a band a band."

about broadening our musical palette. Listening to electronic music and hip-hop also let a song like 'Villainy' happen. We took this Jon Hopkins-inspired beat and track that Ryan made, which we were all so pumped on, and worked these Beach Boys harmonies and melodies over it. And it tied it together and made it feel like us, even though it's something we hadn't done before."

The other essential visit was to Nicaragua toward the end of 2015, after Hahn suggested they check out a studio recommended by a friend. "This guy said he would give us a ridiculous deal if we came and tried it out," Rice says. "It magically happened."

Ewing is quick to note that Local Natives weren't gallivanting around the globe on some kind of cultural conquest. "This wasn't like a Beatles' *White Album*, where you go to India and you hear the sitar," he says. "It's not like there was a huge influenc , but it was just about unplugging and getting away from our daily lives."

But through all the country/studio-hopping, the band came to a moment of clarity. Instead of trying to write what fans or critics or label heads might consider a "Local Natives song"—the layered guitars and keys, the requisite vocal harmonies, the all-organic instrumentation—why not throw out the rule book altogether?

"I think most guidelines are gone," says Ewing. "Kelcey and Ryan were just writing a lot, and they'd show me something, and it'd be, 'That's cool, but it's not a Local Natives song.' But early on in the record process, we said, 'Does that even matter?' If we're super stoked on it, and if it's connecting with us, there's no 'We need to check these boxes. We need two guitars, three harmonies.' There weren't these requirements for it to be a Local Natives song. Whatever created a spark inside of us, we ran with it."

It was a logical move following the brooding, turbulent *Hummingbird*, an album born out of personal strain: namely the death of Ayer's mother and the departure of co-founding bassist Andy Hamm. "I really love that record," Rice says. "But it was the result of us dealing with a pretty dark time, and we had to get out these songs. We had to wrench them out. Some songs, we would slave away on for months, and it was so cathartic in that way, dealing with some difficu times we'd gone through. And we'd gotten that out of our system, and it was a really diffe ent mind-set and vibe coming out of that."

Naturally, after the emotional exorcism of recording that LP, the band was eager for brightness. For the last few years, they'd been soaking in new sounds: psychedelic soul, electronica, hip-hop. Kanye West's cold, minimalist 2013 LP, *Yeezus*, was a huge influenc , and the group even

recorded the Grateful Dead's "Stella Blue" for Aaron and Bryce Dessner's *Day of the Dead* tribute album. ("I've always been drawn to the weird, jazzy, descending chord progression of 'Stella Blue,'" Ewing says. "It's a shame Grateful Dead are mostly seen as a psychedelic jamband, because their catalog is filled with so ma y vulnerable, honest songs. In the spirit of the Dead, we completely flipped the song o its head—basically removing all the guitars as a starting point.") During their numerous plane trips around the world, the band began experimenting with beats and textures on their laptops, setting a foundation for their sleekest, least rock-oriented album to date.

"I hadn't thought about the album in terms of polish before, but I think maybe some of that is just that we're getting better at it," Rice says. "It's our third album, and we're starting to learn the ropes of doing it. We co-produced this record with a friend of ours named Brian Josephs. Even though we did a lot of it at these diffe ent studios around the world, we also did a lot with our own setup in LA at our studio. We'd been pushing ourselves to experiment with production, and we went into a lot of new territory we hadn't been in before. Maybe these are more expressive, optimistic songs. There's an element of that, especially coming off o *Hummingbird*, which was a much more dense, cathartic record."

In a more positive headspace, unshackled from the public's perception of what they should sound like, and with hard drives full of sprawling fragments, Local Natives were excited to try any unexpected idea that popped into their heads.

The album's melodic centerpiece, "Dark Days," finds Ayer romanticizing overcast California days—with a dose of "fear for the afterlife"—over tumbling, programmed drums and pillowy synth pads. It also features a seductive guest spot from Nina Persson, singer of Swedish pop-rock act The Cardigans.

"In some ways, it's the simplest, lightest, breeziest song we've ever done," Rice says. "We were very excited: There are no chords in that song. It's three bass notes that repeat over and over. It has this very simple groove, but that pushed us—that and the chorus, singing about fear of the afterlife. There's some heavy, existential things being explored on that song."

"I remember hearing that demo around a year and a half ago," adds Ewing. "I was very struck by it, but there were no lyrics, only hums. It was like a classic, timeless song. There were some obvious references, like Talking Heads or Fleetwood Mac, which is nothing new for us. But I love when you get a vibe and melody or aesthetic of a song, and that can be misleading. It sounds like summertime or happiness, and the lyrics are such a contrast to that."

The album is filled with similar surprises: the droning guitar loops of "Masters," the unadorned acoustic strums and crackling snares of "Ellie Alice," the glistening synths of "Jellyfish" the latter assisted by Swedish electro-R&B masters Little Dragon). But the LP's most shocking departure is "Coins," which finds yer belting soulful runs over Hahn's D'Angelo-inspired guitar lick. The initial effect is jarring, as if your iTunes has suddenly shuffled un ompted. And the track nearly nudged the band too far outside its comfort zone, even in this free-spirited new state.

"That one is one of those great examples of where a song just comes together so quickly," Rice says. "Ryan saw D'Angelo at the FYF Festival [in 2015], and, the next day, he wrote this guitar riff and melody. I was not in the room, but Ryan basically put the whole thing together in one day. I remember getting an email with the song basically done. And that's so uncommon for that to happen. At fir t, everybody was like, 'This is cool, but I feel like we've crossed a line, possibly. I don't know if this can live in a Local Natives world. Does this make sense?' But over the next week, everybody was jamming on that song. We thought, 'This totally works for us. It's new, but it feels great.' We made a couple of production tweaks, working on the tune. Working on the harmonies brought it into the Local Natives world. Kelcey has such an amazing, soulful voice, but he doesn't often get to show off in that way."

Local Natives have always written from a place of vulnerable—at times painful—intimacy. As a listener, it's easy to feel like a voyeur listening to a transcript of a therapy session—like on *Hummingbird*'s "Three Months," a raw piano confessional that finds yer grappling with his mom's death. The specificity of their lyrics is a calling card—but on *Sunlit Youth*, they've begun to funnel their emotions further outward.

For Rice, the best example of this is "Past Lives," which was inspired by the eerie fatefulness of love—and, well, the philosophical themes of two projects starring Matthew McConaughey.

"The emotion that began the lyrics for 'Past Lives' is that feeling when you're living your life, and there's thousands of people all the time," he says. "There's this sea of people constantly around you, and, at some moment, you connect with somebody. It's almost seemingly random. Out of this huge sea of lives, you connect with somebody all of a sudden and then fall in love. Then, shortly after this moment, it feels crazy that throughout all your diffe ent paths you came together. Very shortly after that, it begins to feel like it was so inevitable. You can't imagine not having this person in your life. That transition is so crazy, the way our lives intermingle with each other.

"That song came out of thinking, 'What is that force that makes you connect with somebody? Do we live in these cycles and loops over and over? What are those forces working to make you have that connection?'" he continues. "I get emotional listening to it, and it might be my favorite song on the record. There are a bunch of philosophical influences on that son . That season one of *True Detective*: 'Time is a flat ci cle.' Not that I subscribe to reincarnation, but I thought that concept was a beautiful way of describing it. Watching [Christopher Nolan's] *Interstellar* really hit a nerve as well. It's exploring those ideas of how we come to love the people we do, and if it's inevitable."

With *Sunlit Youth*, Local Natives have forged a bold, even risky, path forward—trusting a primarily indie-rock audience to follow them. But after a decade of struggling to manage so many creative personalities, Rice is only concerned that they impress themselves.

"We can do whatever we want," he says. "We can mess around until something sounds fresh and exciting to us. People ask why we went to Nicaragua and Thailand—it was to remind us that there's only one thing to follow, and that's the spark of the thing that's pulling you to feel super excited to create. That had to be the guiding principle of making music together."

Brian Roettinger

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THE MOTET IN MOTION

Colorado's funky house band embraces their new, East Coast-soul.

BY JOHN ADAMIAN

It was a late autumn afternoon, in 2015, and Lyle Divinsky had just played a low-key, solo acoustic gig at Springfield College in Massachusetts. On his way back home to Maine, Divinsky—a soul singer who'd just released his debut album—received a message from one of the members of The Motet. It was his fir t time speaking with anyone from the group, and they were interested in collaborating.

"I had just played a lunch study hall or something like that," Divinsky says, one year and one studio album into that partnership with The Motet.

Things kicked into overdrive. Everything was set in motion—and the parts haven't stopped moving, which makes sense since, at their core, The Motet make people move. The Colorado outfit pl ys kinetic dance music, with coiled guitar lines and rhythmic patterns that overlap and intertwine, creating tension, gathering energy and releasing it in controlled blasts. Motion and flux a e part of the deal. But, as with all the best dance music, part of what keeps it all working is the sense of continuity within the change. And there's been plenty of change recently for this band.

Last December, The Motet's longtime singer and frontman Jans Ingber announced that he was leaving the group, amicably, to cultivate a more balanced home and family life. With that, a whole new set of variations and permutations kicked into effect, makin 2016 a year that has been both in keeping with The Motet's mode and unlike any other year in their 18-year existence. In the middle of recording their new record, *Totem*, released in July, the group tried out and hired Divinsky, 30, as their new vocalist. And then the band started cramming—researching, listening, petitioning each other with song choices—for their epic run of thematic Halloween shows. (This year's focuses on the music of 1979.) The Halloween shows and the effor involved in picking and learning the material anchor much of the year's energies for the members of The Motet, fueling their creativity and pointing them in new directions for the future.

The Motet, formed in 1998 by drummer and bandleader Dave Watts, started out doing percussion music—from Afro-Brazilian samba to djembe ensemble pieces—and moved to playing tunes heavily influenced y West African and Afro-Cuban music, with deep polyrhythmic underpinnings. (Watts and two other early members of the group visited Cuba to immerse themselves in Batá drumming, part of the band's whole study-up-and-synthesize approach to threading new elements into their music.) They've continued to shape-shift, stylistically spanning genres and continents, ever since.

Listen to "Sunu" off o their debut record, *Breathe*. At the song's core, it's a djembe rhythm, from Mali and Guinea, with deep, bass-like dundun drums and bell patterns, over which the crisp djembe plays offbeat accen . But it morphs into a slow funk-soul instrumental with wah-wah guitar, perky bass and organ, and a drum kit linking the West African percussion ensemble. Later on the record, the band shifts into Fela-inflecte Afrobeat on "Jiti" and then into a groove-heavy, speed-racer rendering of Eddie Harris' "Freedom Jazz Dance," a knotted tune of circling intervallic leaps made famous by Miles Davis, which glides back into West African djembe mode before winding down. And then they launch into "Yogi's Day Out," a honky-tonk swing barnstormer, to close out the record, which is just to say that the band has always been comfortable working through changes, without seeming stitched together. Jump ahead to The Motet's self-titled 2014 record and the band is a diffe ent beast—and yet still the same—fully onboard with the soul-funk, channeling Tower of Power, Stevie Wonder and Earth, Wind & Fire, all three of which, incidentally, were the focus of Motet Halloween shows (2003, 2002 and 2010, respectively).

"I think that with a band that's growing, there tends to be consistent change going on as you have growing pains and you're striving for diffe ent degrees of success," says Watts. "We've always experienced that as a band—shifting and changing."

* * *

As the Motet has bent, morphed, swerved and expanded its scope, so has the music culture at large. The group started performing Fela tunes and playing West African dance music just ahead of what would become an Afrobeat renaissance in America. In 2001, MCA reissued the Fela Kuti catalog, making dozens of formerly ultra-rare recordings available to a new generation of fans, as other like-minded bands like New York's Antibalas gained an audience. The burst of interest culminated in the

One rhythm, diffe ent perspectives: Joey Porter, Ryan Jalbert, Gabriel Mervine, Dave Watts, Drew Sayers, Garrett Sayers, Lyle Divinsky (l-r)

Emily Sevin

musical *Fela!*, which opened on Broadway in 2009.

"There was an Afrobeat revival that happened about 15 or 20 years ago," says Motet bassist Garrett Sayers, who joined the band in 2002 after years on the jamband circuit with Miracle Orchestra. "It was such an exciting style that was somehow missed by most Americans, and we were just so excited to be a part of it."

The Motet's move toward more explicitly funk- and soul-centric music made perfect sense coming from those starting points. Fela's Afrobeat is famously shaped by African-American influence , all run through a filter that orked traditional Nigerian elements in as well. And American music fans can relate to the familiarity of the heavy funk foundation.

"Fela and others decided to mix that influence with thei country's heritage," says Sayers. "To then have that come back to us again as funk fans—I can hear the James Brown in there, but it's flipped on its head"

Understanding that lineage—and paying tribute to it—is part of what's at the core of The Motet's musical philosophy. "As a drummer, that is something that I'm extremely conscious of," says Watts. "I think that funk music is America's African music, influenced di ectly by the movement of African rhythms and musical culture into the United States, going back to Congo Square [the one place where enslaved Africans were permitted to play their rich drum-based music]."

This year, the arrival of a new singer furthers The Motet's evolution, dialing in a mellow soul vibe as a counterpart to the percussive funk. When he got the call to collaborate with The Motet in what was a sort of an unspoken tryout, Lyle Divinsky was deep into the launch of his own solo career.

Divinsky, who has grown from New York City street busking to performing on big stages, had been working on his record *Uneven Floors* when he reached a crossroads. "I put [the record] out in November, then, like two weeks later, I get a call from [keyboardist] Joey [Porter]," says Divinsky. "It was an amazing opportunity, and I'd been digging their music for a long time."

In what sounds like a trial-by-fi e test of one's creative juices, The Motet sent Divinsky a track of music and asked him to take a shot at writing lyrics and a vocal melody.

"Watts sent me an instrumental, just to see how I would do," says Divinsky. "Two days later, I sent back 'The Truth.'" That was in mid-December. Two days after that, they sent him another tune, which became "Fool No More." And two weeks later, in early January, they flew Divinsk out to Colorado to rehearse; it was his fir t time meeting most of them. A week after that, with Divinsky filling in afte Ingber's recent departure, the band went out for a two-week string of live dates. A month later, which included another two weeks of shows, The Motet was back in the studio to record the rest of *Totem* with Divinsky fully immersed in the project. "It was just as much fast family and fast friends as it was fast comfort within the music," says Divinsky.

The Motet isn't a band that necessarily expects new members to step in and entirely conform to a pre-existing template. Part of what refreshes the group is the result of a shifting bunch of players. The band has been a sextet at times, and they've ballooned to up to 10 and 12 members at times. The Motet is currently a seven-piece outfi —in addition to Watts, Sayers, Porter and Divinsky, there's guitarist Ryan Jalbert, trumpeter Gabe Mervine, and Drew Sayers on tenor sax. But The Motet could mushroom into another iteration before long, and it probably will. In certain ways, they have also

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POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Nahko and Medicine for the People issue a call to action with their new album, *HOKA*.

BY DEAN BUDNICK

"I DON'T COME FROM A BIG hippie background but, as I've learned over the years, what I'm really doing is energy work. People's energy is malleable and you can work with them to do so much." Nahko Bear is referencing his performance ethos, but this statement could apply to almost every facet of his life, which seamlessly blends music and activism.

The Nahko and Medicine for the People frontman, who is of Apache, Puerto Rican and Filipino descent, named his band's latest record, *HOKA*, after the Lokota expression "Hoka, hey." This phrase is a call to action that venerable chiefs such as Crazy Horse bellowed before entering battle, and it translates to: "Today is a good day to die."

As Nahko expounds in a mission statement he has shared with his fans, "Within our global community, we have access to the tools needed to make changes, take action and spread awareness of how to live in harmony with Mother Gaia herself. We are honored to be a force of attraction for positive and creative minds during these often-corrupt times. With your trust and support, we humbly accept this role and speak our prayers of intention to take direct action. 'Hoka, hey' means 'Today is a good day to die,' but perhaps with your help, it could transform into a 'Better day to live.' Thank you again for your love and support. Tribe members, let us come together today to be the change that we wish to see tomorrow."

The tribe he is referencing extends beyond those of Native American heritage and reflects the growing community Nahko has nurtured during a personal journey that has carried him from Portland, Ore.—where he grew up—to Alaska, Hawaii and then around the globe.

Nahko Parayno most assuredly did not come from a hippie background. He was raised by a conservative Christian family who adopted him at 9 months old and subsequently homeschooled him. He would go on to admire the life and art of Ken Kesey, but although the musician lived 100 miles from Kesey's homebase in Eugene, he did not discover the writer's work until relocating to Alaska at age 18. (The state is also the setting of Kesey's novel *Sailor Song*.) As Nahko, who is now 30, notes, "My uncle had grown up in that era and was in the same circles as Kesey. He was also a Deadhead and he hung out with Janis Joplin. After I left home, he was finally able to talk to me about it. When I was with my family, he wasn't able to talk to me about it because my mom wouldn't let him, and I was like, 'Oh my God. All this happened in the state where I was from.' I'm just fascinated with the lifestyle of living in a van or hitchhiking around the country. I started doing all that stuff and I learned h w to do it all." He pauses and then adds one qualification: "I n ver hopped trains, but you can't do everything."

The new record was produced by Ted Hutt (The Gaslight Anthem, Old Crow Medicine Show, Lucero, Dropkick Murphys) and also features band members Chase Makai (guitar), Justin Chittams (drums), Pato (bass and kora), Tim Snider (violin) and Max Ribner (horns). Unlike Nahko and Medicine for the People's fir t two studio records, *Dark as Night* (2013) and *On the Verge* (2014), the group devoted some time to the pre-production process, honing the material, which spans the past seven years of Nahko's life.

"I took a lot of care in picking the songs, and I spent a lot of time talking to Ted about the songs and playing them for him. I have a back catalog—a lot of songs that just didn't get recorded and I'd just uploaded them to YouTube, which is why I say we work backward a lot," he explains. "As a band, we spent about a month rehearsing before we recorded, and we reworked some of the songs, but it was also really fun. That's what it's about: You've got to keep it fun. I have a big love for hip-hop records that really tie songs together with little pieces of audio and accentuated stories, and that's what my intention was with this record: to have diffe ent little pieces. You see 19 tracks on there, but there are really only about 14 songs."

HOKA's narrative relates Nahko's personal journey through a series of revelatory songs that often aspire to achieve communal catharsis.

For instance, "San Quentin" reflects a p ofound encounter that the musician shared with the man who murdered his father. Nahko's birth mother was only 14 years old when she was forced into human trafficki . He learned of her story years later, along with the account of his father's death, which led him to visit the individual responsible for the crime, who was then incarcerated in the California prison of the song's title.

"There's actually another side of that story that's not done yet," Nahko reveals. "He was released from prison that year because my brothers and sisters were so moved by the story that they spoke up on his behalf. He was deported back to the Philippines on Christmas Day, which was the day that he killed my dad, 20 years later. What he had told me was that, if he ever got out—which at the time I thought was impossible—he wanted to go reconcile with *his* dad who was dying of cancer. He hadn't had a visitor in that whole time, so he was looking forward to going back home and saying to his father, 'I'm sorry I shamed my family.'

"Another thing he told me before I left him that day was that, if he ever got out, he'd like to take me fishin . He told me he wanted to do that to give back because, he said, 'My dad would take me fishing and our dad never got to do anything with you.' So now that he's out, finishing the tory to me would be finding him in the Philippines and having him take me fishin ."

Nahko hopes to visit the country, which is currently in the midst of political turmoil, at some point in the near future. As he discloses, "A woman named Robin Lim reached out to me. She's a Filipino who lives in Indonesia. She started a birthing center teaching women how to be midwives. The Indonesian government has this policy where, if you have a baby in the hospital and you can't affo d to pay the fees, then they keep your baby. A number of babies die as a result of this, so she opened a birthing clinic and also began teaching people to become midwives so they can get around that law. She started an organization [Bumi Sehat, which means 'Healthy Earth Mother'] to address this problem. I know I have work to do in the Philippines that may have to do

Nahko and Medicine for the People: Justin Chittams, Chase Makai, Pato, Max Ribner, Tim Snider and Nahko Bear (l-r)

with midwifery or Robin Lim, or it may be something else entirely. I just know that I feel called to be there."

As he shares his account via phone from Mount Shasta, Calif., Nahko is astride a horse, relaxing with a ride on the day before he will travel to the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota to join a protest against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which has been opposed by the Standing Rock Sioux along with other tribal nations and environmentalists. He continues to push for renewable energy and also prides himself on his ability to "create a safety net through music and serve as a bridge to bring people together, because there are so many tribal people who just don't talk to each other but are all su˜ ering from big oil." In Mount Shasta, he is working with the Winnemem Wintu Tribe on their Run 4 Salmon campaign, bringing awareness to the impact of the Shasta Dam, which flooded their village and resulted in the disappearance of Chinook salmon from nearby spawning grounds.

Do you feel that musicians, particularly in this day and age, have a responsibility to use their platform to express their views on politics or social reform?

I would hope that could've been something we learned from the '60s, but it's obvious that's not the case. Everyone's got opinions, but they all don't necessarily feel that it's their place to share those opinions on the stage. That's fair—not everybody is made for that. But I view it as an amazing place to share information, and it's one of the most powerful places to share opinions and have a solution-based atmosphere with people. Rather than talk about how fucked up things are, let's talk about how we can solve things.

Moving away from activism, I'm fascinated by your time as the music director at an Alaskan dinner theater. How did that come about?

When I was 17, I left home and went to community college. I wasn't feeling it and, at that time, I was working as a music director at a community theater just outside of Portland. I was there for four or five months when this woman came in from Alaska and said, "I just left a job after 25 years; I think you'd be great for it." I had never left Oregon. I told her, "Yeah, if you want to recommend me..." They hired me and, about three months later, I was flying up to Alaska. All of a sudden, I was in charge of this theater group. I was barely 18 and had never left home.

I come from a really conservative background. I had never really drunk alcohol before and had never done drugs before. When I got up there, the first thing a kid said to me was, "Hey, man, you want a beer?" I told him I was only 18 so I couldn't really drink beer, and he told me he didn't care about my age. So I said, "Oh, sure, I guess I'll have a beer." Things sort of went from there.

I'd work from 3–11 p.m. just playing piano. It really worked my chops up, got my on-the-fly playing going. The play was about Denali National Park. There would be two shows a night for 500 people. I had to play music from the 1920s to the 1940s, and I was the emcee.

Meanwhile, I was exploring as well. It was the middle of nowhere Alaska, and it was the first time I had ever been charged by a moose and seen bears in the wild and all this crazy stu˜ . That was really formidable for me—it showed me how small I was in the world.

I started reading Jack Kerouac. I met a lot of travelers and they showed me the kind of lifestyle that I became accustomed to—that vagabond, living o˜ pennies kind of way. It was a seasonal job, so I was there for about six months and, right after that first season, I bought a van in Northern California and drove to Louisiana. I had never been there before and I lived in this three-story house with 12 other people who didn't have jobs. There were massive amounts

of psychedelics involved. I was traveling by myself—learning what it was like to be away from home, finding yself and learning the ropes of the road.

When I went back that next spring to Alaska, I decided I would drive my van this time, packed full of bikes, skateboards and all this summer stuff. When I got up to about the Yukon territory, with snow still on the ground, my van broke down. I had to hitchhike and ditch everything. I showed up empty-handed but I had a job waiting for me. They wouldn't hire me back as the music director because I was so loose that previous year. I was really going for it—showing up to work tripping. I was a kid, I was exploring and I had no understanding of the responsibility required to do a job like that. So I worked that summer just washing dishes and working at a restaurant as a cook.

I wrote a lot of songs in those times, and I discovered the WWOOFing program [World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms], a work-trade program, and I bought a $200 ticket to Hawaii and left Alaska behind. When I got to Hawaii, I was finally able to get y work ethic in shape.

You eventually were invited to purchase land to start a farm?
It was completely divine. It's a lease-to-own. We're going to buy it outright in the next fi e years. My land partner and I basically knew zilch about farming at the time, but this guy met my buddy and said, "I think you guys should take a piece of land and see what you can do with it." Then, my friend called me up like, "Dude, I don't know what I'm doing." I showed up and we spent the next seven or eight years building this little farm, and it's one of those places that's paying its own rent at the moment. We started a business growing a grass from Haiti called vetiver. It's great—it's a soil-erosion solution for tropical regions. We plant it around people's houses where they have possible erosion

because the houses are on the hillside.

The roots also are amazing for aromatherapy, so we sell the oils. We also sell eucalyptus and lemongrass oil [at vetiverfarmshawaii.com]. I haven't been as involved during the past four years because I've been touring a lot, but I like to go once or twice a year just to check on the place and see how it's going. It's a slow build, but it's a really fun place to have a project.

You mentioned Kerouac earlier. To what extent is he still in the back of your mind, informing your songwriting?
I think he's there as an overarching piece. It wasn't about his idealism or even about the adventures he went on; it was more about his way of being and how he was able to go with the fl w so well. At the same time I was reading him I was listening to Paul Simon and Bright Eyes and Neil Young and Talking Heads. I was getting this flood of information from the kids I was hanging out with in Alaska who sort of took me in and educated me.

Do you remember the fir t song that you wrote?
Absolutely, it was horrible. I think I still have it on VHS. The fir t open mic I ever went to was at the theater I ended up working at before I went to Alaska. I had this video camera that I bought, and I recorded it. It's somewhere in my mom's attic, I think.

This is how conservative my family was: I couldn't have girlfriends. I couldn't get a girl's number and I couldn't call a girl from my mom's phone. It was just really strict. Eventually, there was this one girl who I just wanted to go hang out with, and I went and had a coffee date with he . She wanted a raspberry Italian soda, and I was so infatuated with her afterward. She had cool wingtip shoes and a really rad record player with a huge record collection—she was that kind of girl. So afterward, I wrote this song called "Raspberry Charm." How bad is that? [*Laughs.*]

I have a black book at home that has all the songs I used to write when I was a teenager. The lyrics are there and the chord progressions are there—that's how organized I was.

You have a special relationship with your fans, one of whom created a video that really introduced you to the world.
It was funny—we had actually made another video ourselves for "Me and Mr. Washington" and, that same week, somebody posted the "Aloha Ke Akua" video on my page. I thought, "Oh, cute, a fan video—I'll check it out later." A couple of days later when I finally watched it, I just cried and was very emotional. It was so cool and I couldn't believe they had done that.

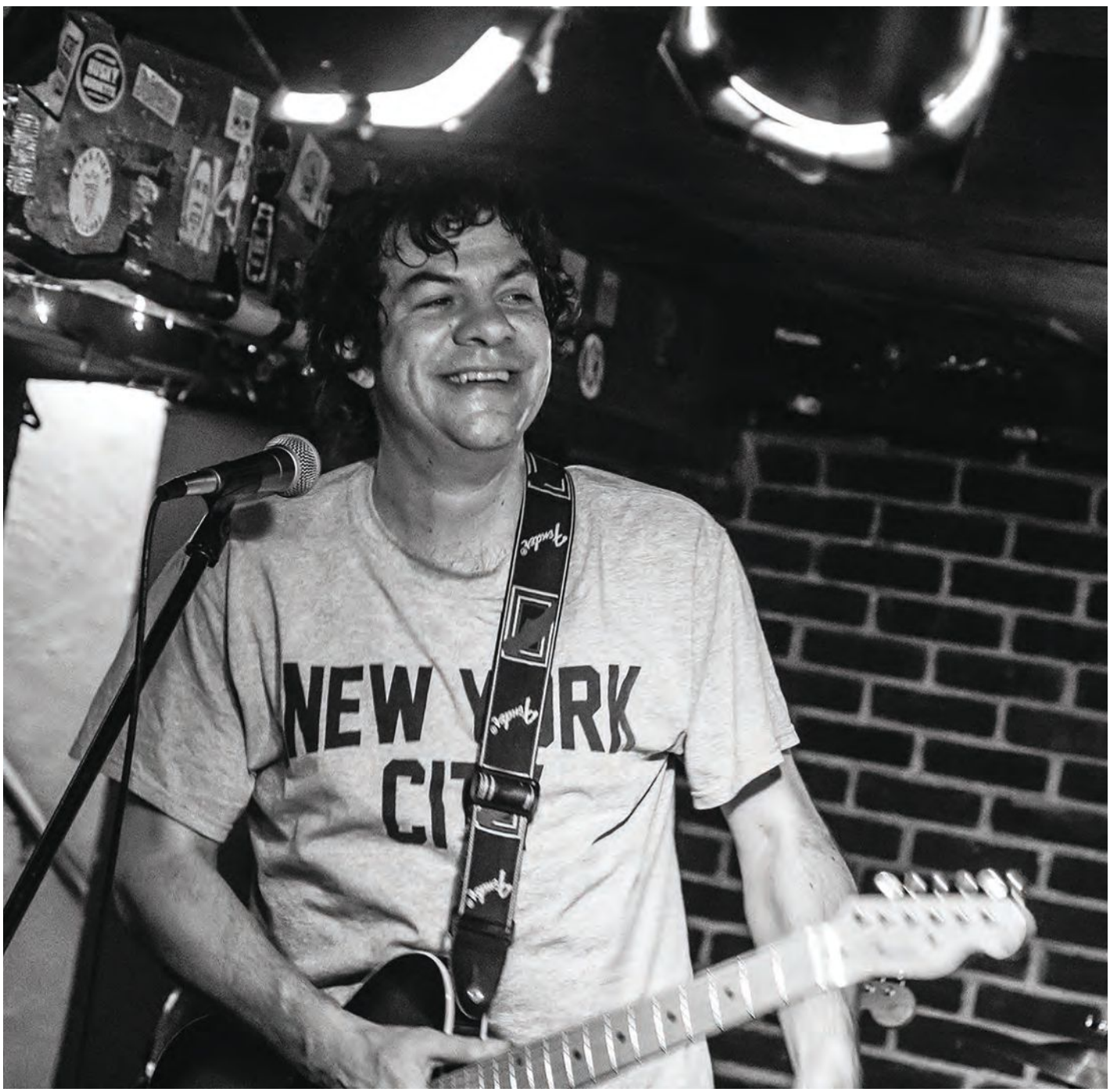
It was one of the songs I hadn't officially ecorded yet—it was a demo that I played on piano. My way of doing things back in the day was I would burn CDs with random tracks I recorded on GarageBand or at a show or on my phone, and I would throw those on a CD. I probably burned a couple thousand of those over a few years. I'd give them out to people when I would play at farmers' markets or at coffeehouse . Somewhere along the way, he got one of those CDs, then he bought some of this stock footage for commercials and put the music to it.

When I fir t watched it, it only had 50 views and, now, it has 6 million views. Over the course of that year, people would write to me from Norway or Bermuda or Morocco or wherever and tell me: "I just watched 'Aloha Ke Akua' and it's so amazing—it changed my life." And I thought, "Wow, that's so crazy—what a gift." That became the song that really helped people discover us, and also created transformations through the song and video.

Even with his longtime band in the midst of a festival sweep, Mickey Melchiondo sets his sights on a parallel solo career with the help of his Ween brethren.

BY MATT INMAN

What Deaner Was Talkin' About



Ween, pictured above, performed two sets at this year's Lockn' festival. After a slightly darker and "browner" spot on Thursday, Ween loaded their pre-dusk concert on Friday with some of their best known cuts, including "Your Party," "Bananas and Blow," "Voodoo Lady," "Piss Up a Rope" and "Roses Are Free." (Trey Anastasio, who covers the latter song with Phish, took in a portion of the show sidestage.)

Dean Budnick (Ween)

OVER THREE DECADES after forming his oddball alt-rock duo, Mickey Melchiondo is in the midst of a creative renaissance. The guitarist, better known as Dean Ween, has spent the past eight months on a fervently anticipated reunion tour with Ween, released a solo album—the fir t of his career—and is experiencing what he says is the most creatively fertile songwriting period of his life.

"I hold myself to this ethic of a song a day, and I do it, like Prince did or Neil Young—the people I really admire the most, respect the most and whose music I love the most—that's where I'm at right now," says Melchiondo, who, even as he speaks from his home in New Hope, Pa., is preparing for a busy night at his weekly jam session at a local venue, and perhaps even some recording time with the same musicians he'll be playing with. "I go to the studio every day, pretty much all day. If I have no ideas, I work on something I did yesterday to improve it. I've gotten used to it, and I love it. It's very liberating."

It took him some time to get to this point, however, starting when Ween began what turned into a four-year hiatus in 2012. After working with longtime friend and collaborator Aaron Freeman, aka Gene Ween, since the mid-'80s, there was a bit of a learning curve when Melchiondo was embarking on this new, solo chapter of his career. "There was so much going on in my head. I had to figu e out where I was gonna go—if I even wanted to be a musician anymore," says Melchiondo, who also pursued a parallel career as a fisherman. "I'm so used to having the best creative partner in the world in Aaron. He would have an idea, or I would have an idea, or we'd both have an idea—or we'd have no idea. All the best Ween songs were written by both me and Aaron together."

Lacking his usual songwriting sounding board, Melchiondo turned to his coterie of musical friends, including the other members of Ween—bassist Dave Dreiwitz, drummer Claude Coleman Jr. and keyboardist Glenn McClelland—who all currently tour with Melchiondo as the Dean Ween Group.

"He's in a productive phase of writing and recording," Dreiwitz says of Melchiondo. "He's playing all the time, probably more than he has in the past—having a guitar in his hands for more hours a day than he might have before. He's having fun with it, and that's the most important thing."

That's not to say that Melchiondo wasn't having fun previously, and he's the fir t to explain that his solo effort aren't the typical, yearning-to-do-my-own-thing kind of outlet that many songwriters in bands experience. "Ween pretty much satisfied y every need," he says. "Definitely not constraining band to be in—I'll never make that claim. It wasn't like there was a part of my soul that wasn't represented on a Ween record. If we wanted to play fast, slow, country or metal, it was always there as an outlet."

But, after constructing a new studio to further his creative endeavors, Melchiondo began to consider doing a record that would be solely his, and the question arose: What's the purpose of a collection of non-Ween Dean Ween tunes? "I really started to think, 'If I'm going to make my own record, what do I want to get out of it?'" Melchiondo says. The answer came to him quickly: The album would reflect his enewed focus on the guitar, which, he says almost reticently, has slowly become his main musical outlet.

"I have, over the years, become a guitar player," Melchiondo admits, the sense of deep, personal struggle apparent in his phrasings. "In Ween, we wear so many hats—I'm the drummer, I'm the guitar player, I'm the bass player, I'm the keyboard player—and so is Aaron. [For this,] I decided to really focus on my guitar.

"And songs, of course," he adds, making it clear that he didn't want the album to be *too* focused on guitar. "There's nothing more important than the song. When you think of guitar only as a guitarist, you think, 'What is compelling to listen to that only guitarists are going to listen to?' I don't like that kind of shit. Unless you're *so* good that you can do that—like Jeff Beck or somethin . I'm into songwriting, so I wanted to bring that to the front. It's all songs, not wanking guitar shit."

The album, appropriately titled *The Deaner Album*, accomplishes both goals—some tracks tilt toward guitar-heavy romps, while others are more song-oriented—collecting 14 eclectic numbers that range from brash to understated, from jaunty to earnest, resulting in what Dreiwitz calls both "a guitar party" and "a funky good time."

"They say you have your whole life to make your fir t

record," Melchiondo says. "And even though I've been doing this since '84, I've had my whole life to make *The Deaner Album*. So, to me, it's like a compilation, in a way." He adds that the themes of the record tend to center around "self-loathing and righteousness at the same time—that's something we've kind of always done."

Although he's now writing mostly by himself, Melchiondo has not drastically changed his creative approach from what he did with Ween. "I'm in my bedroom right now, looking at scraps of paper with song titles, chord progressions, some lyrics that I may have written three years ago," he says. "And some of it's brand new and the whole thing is written in fi e minutes from start to finish. t all gets represented, in time. But I have so much to draw upon. Life is the most inspiring thing—more than music, more than other people's music."

There are, however, nods to other people's music within *The Deaner Album*'s songs. Opening track "Dickie Betts," an instrumental romp in the style of the Allman Brothers Band, deliberately wears its intention on its sleeve. "A lot of jazz artists—Miles Davis in particular—would make an homage to somebody—playing in that mode or that style—and they would call it that. Like, 'Billy Preston,'" Melchiondo explains. "Miles Davis has a million. So I was trying to come up with a title for it, and what I'm trying to do here is really obvious—I'm trying to do the Allman Brothers thing, without stealing anything directly. It's the perfect title—there it is. So no one can go, like, 'Oh, this song sounds like a rip-off of the Allman Brothers.' It is, dumbass! It's a tribute!"

Another tribute comes in the final t ack, a cover of Funkadelic's "Promentalshitb ackwashpsychosis Enema Squad (The Doo Doo Chasers)," sans George Clinton's scato-logical voiceover. Melchiondo calls the song a "bottom-of-the-ninth addition," which came about when his friend, and Funkadelic guitarist, Michael Hampton, who played on the original *One Nation Under a Groove* cut, happened to be in the studio. The song was also part of the Dean Ween Group's unofficial unkadelic tribute show earlier this year. They were set to play with keyboardist Bernie Worrell, but the funk icon was unable to make it to the performance due to his ongoing battle with lung cancer. Worrell passed away just days after the show.

"It was going to be his last gig, if he could make it, but he was too sick," Melchiondo says. Worrell, who hailed "right up the road" from where Melchiondo grew up and still lives, guested with Ween at Berkeley's Greek Theatre in 2003. "I knew Bernie and played with him, and having Michael was huge, so we put a bunch of P-Funk covers in there so, if he did show up, he could sit-in with us. But, sadly, he didn't make it."

* * *

MELCHIONDO IS CLEARLY enjoying the third act of his career. Ween reunited for three sold-out shows at Broomfield Colo.'s 1stBank Center in February and is currently in the midst of a cross-country sweep that includes major festivals and large marquee clubs. He calls having both his solo gig and Ween going at the same time "a blessing" and that songs he's "played a million times feel like they're brand new again"—but his real interest lies in the future, in what happens next. He's proud of *The Deaner Album*, but it's much more of a beginning than a culmination for him.

"I can't wait to get past it, to be honest with you," Melchiondo says, speaking more about the album cycle than the album itself. "I feel accomplished, but *nothing* compares to what has come since I finished it. I fee like that record is already yesterday's news to me—not in a bad way—it's just funny to me. I'm doing this interview and promoting something when I have a hundred new songs. But that's my nature. Whatever I started with that record, I'm starting to fully realize now.

"I'm constantly in motion, constantly working on the next thing," he continues. "I could probably put out my new record right now." Alas, that's not how releases work nowadays, as record companies continue to stretch album cycles to maximize sales. Although he notes the merits of the social media age—where artists can write, record and share a track in a single day—Melchiondo also recognizes that giving fans space between releases is helpful, too.

"It's like when you go to dinner and the food comes out too quickly," he says, showing a penchant for metaphor. "Sometimes it can be a drag—if you're out with your wife and you set aside two hours for dinner. That's like the way that a record company doesn't want a record every three months. Elvis Costello used to do that, and I loved it—there was always a new Elvis record, and he toured two or three times a year when he was really cooking—but there's benefit to that system and there's disadvantages."

The Costello reference also reflects another facet o Melchiondo's thought process: While he's consistently and decidedly looking forward, he has far too much history and experience to not speak of the past at times. And while one of his great passions is playing live music, he noticeably mourns the loss of the album as an art form.

"Nobody buys albums. For me, that's tragic," he says. "In this day and age, making records is this byproduct, something you do so you can go tour. I felt it on *La Cucaracha* [Ween's 2007 album]. I was so disappointed—the way it was so meaningless as an album. We put a lot of work into our albums. We wanted to make something that you sat down with—held in your hand, looked at while you listened to it. We wanted you to listen to the sequence of the songs. The fir t day review copies went out, it was posted online, stolen, shared. That was just a bummer."

> "All the best Ween songs were written by both me and Aaron together."
> **DEAN WEEN**

* * *

AFTER THREE DECADES IN THE business—during an especially volatile time for that business, for that matter—Melchiondo and Ween have seen it all. "Thank God Ween has been around for so long that we've been through fi e diffe ent changes in the music," Melchiondo says, detailing their trek from radio to music videos and MTV, and up to the current coupling of touring and online streaming. He doesn't lament the changes, but he does feel that younger bands might be getting short-changed when starting out.

"I don't think an up-and-coming band will ever have the opportunities to develop like Ween did, you know?" Melchiondo says. "By the time we got signed to make our fir t record, *GodWeenSatan*, we'd already had seven years under our belt. We were way into our career. I think that's really important, to go through those stages, and I don't see that as much anymore. Not necessarily suffering th ough dues-paying, but..." He pauses, then gives in, laughing, "Yeah, sufferin through dues-paying. That's how you get experience, and that's how you get better."

Throughout all their suffering and dues-p ying—and successes, of course—Ween has never been your average band, and surprising their fans—along with themselves—is part of what has kept them alive and kicking for all these years. And even though *The Deaner Album* is Melchiondo's fir t solo record, the eclectic eccentricities hold true.

"That's what people expect and want from us, Ween and Dean Ween Group," Melchiondo says. "I think Ween fans would have been really bummed if we ever repeated ourselves, but we never did. And it wasn't really intentional—it's just growth."

ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS:

A CONVERSATION

WITH

BOB WEIR

AND

JOSH RITTER

COWBOYS & INDIE-ROCK

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

In March 2012, members of The National brought a supergroup's worth of New York musicians to Bob Weir's TRI Studios for a cross-genre HeadCount benefit dubbe "The Bridge Session." In addition to nurturing The National's own multi-volume tribute, Day of the Dead, *the two-set performance, which heavily featured players from Brooklyn, N.Y.'s indie-rock community, introduced Weir to Yellowbirds' Josh Kaufman, who served as the event's musical director. A while after making that pilgrimage, Kaufman—a lifelong Deadhead who has gone on to produce prominent indie and modern folk acts like Craig Finn and Josh Ritter—encouraged Weir to revisit some of the fi eside songs and cowpoke stories he learned while living on a ranch in his teens.*

Blue Mountain, *Weir's first studio album in over a decade and first collection of entirely original material in more than 30 years, is the result of their discussions and a spiritual successor to the cowboy songs he brought to the Grateful Dead, like "El Paso," "Me & My Uncle" and "Mexicali Blues." Weir co-wrote* Blue Mountain *with Kaufman and Ritter, the album's primary lyricist, and recorded the authentic country-western collection on both coasts, utilizing his regular RatDog family, Kaufman's musical circle and other multigenerational roots ambassadors. Weir completed the record during a late-career renaissance that has included last year's celebrated Fare Thee Well performances, the launch of Dead & Company, and myriad sit-ins and pop-up appearances. Shortly before the album's October release on Columbia/Legacy, Weir and Ritter explored their new creative process during the following wide-ranging, free-form conversation.*

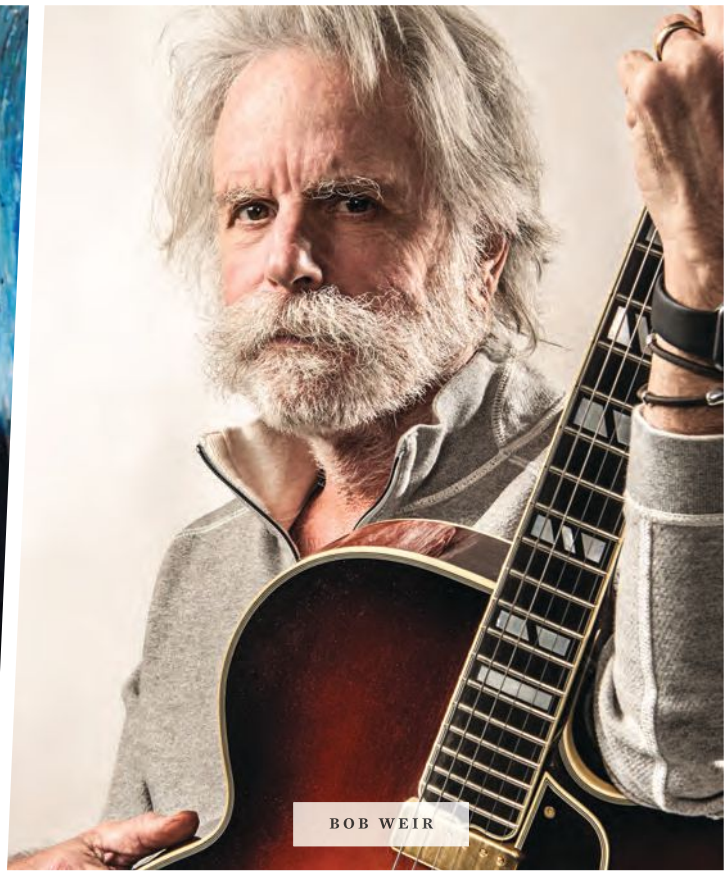
Bob, *Blue Mountain*'s roots actually predate the Grateful Dead, stretching back to when you spent time living at the Bar Cross Ranch in Wyoming. What led you to revisit those days with Josh Ritter?

BOB WEIR: The impetus to do this record came from two currents that fl wed together, and, as you said, one got started back in the early '60s when I was working ranches as a kid and living in bunkhouses. My eyes were opened to a culture, which still existed that predated radio. It was a total oral culture and a rich one. And what the old cowpokes did at night—what they naturally fell into—was storytelling and songs. I was a kid with a guitar, so I learned to accompany those songs, and it was good ear-training because I had to intuit what the next chord was gonna be and when it was gonna arrive—or I was gonna suffer some abus . That was something that stuck with me. Over the years, if a cowboy song came up and caught my ear for one reason or another, I might do it with the Grateful Dead simply because it seemed natural, whereas other folks wouldn't have thought it was cool to do a song like "El Paso." It was a little bit of an enigma to me and I felt I could breathe a little life into that stuff.

The second current happened after the show I did at my TRI Studios with a bunch of guys from Brooklyn. That crew was being wrangled by Josh Kaufman, and we worked well together and had a great time. I was amazed that I was able to play with that many guitarists and musicians without it becoming a cluttered mess. Everybody listened to each other and played appropriately. When they were playing, they were doing something that was relevant to what other people were playing, and that impressed me greatly because that's where I live. When we were done everybody shook hands, slapped each other on the butts, hugged and then went back to their respective lives. But a year or two later, Josh Kaufman called out of the blue and said he was talking to some guys and had this notion to do a cowboy record, and that's where I pass this off to Josh [Ritter].

JOSH RITTER: As I remember it, I was talking with Josh [Kaufman] at an airport. He called me about something else, and he was telling me how excited he was—that he had been talking to you about a project like this. And I said, "This is the most incredible thing I've heard, and what a great idea to make a record with these songs." These old cowboy songs are a part of American history, deep in our bloodstream. The depth of experience living in them is so profound—and the chance to try and write something like those songs is something I would have given anything for. Without any hesitation, I begged Josh to let me try and send him a song to see if it sounded like what you guys had been talking about. I was on fi e to try because I'm from

JOSH RITTER


BOB WEIR

Idaho, and we grew up with some of that mythology of the cowboys and loggers and all these mythic people. Even if this project didn't work out, it would've started me down a whole new thing because it was just so exciting.

You both have experience arranging traditional American music for your own projects and using the American landscape as a reference point in your original material, but you come from di˜ erent songwriting backgrounds. Josh tends to write on his own, while Bob, you have worked with a few steady songwriting collaborators over the years. Can you describe how your writing partnership developed during the course of this project?

WEIR: For me, a song gets written however it gets written. Sometimes, a shard of melody presents itself and I go around looking for a lyric to couple with that. Sometimes a lyric will come and I'll put a melody to it or a musical texture to it. Sometimes, they both arrive at the same time, and sometimes something else happens. There's no way for me to tell where a song comes from. They hide behind bushes; they jump at you from rocks up above your head. They land on you. They come through that window in the sky however they're gonna come. It's like cosmic waves—I have a feeling we're being barraged by them all the time, and it's just a matter of whether or not you're open at a given moment to hearing that because, when a song comes to you, it's coming from where you go when you're dreaming, or where you are when you're dreaming. I'm not sure you go there, or you just forget you're there when you're awake.

RITTER: I love that, and I totally agree with you. The most exciting thing about art, in general, is the excitement for the future and seeing what's gonna happen, and seeing what songs are gonna come down the way—trying to stay open and open-minded about everything. This process was a real learning experience for me. I had not had the opportunity to work with someone who was so open-minded before. Finding ideas freely, and then incorporating and adding such depth to them, was so exciting. And when we got to work together and we were trading ideas over the phone or over email, it was so gratifying to be able to work in such a cool, close way, knowing that we were working with ideas together. I just loved it; I learned so much about ways to work and be open. I'm trying to incorporate that approach into my life.

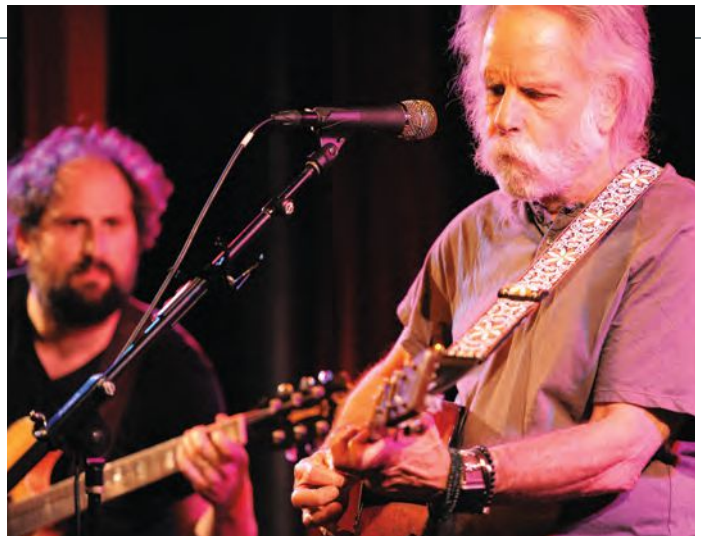
WEIR: I've had experiences with other people where certain characters show up in their dreams and in my dreams and, after we talk about it, we realize that they're the same characters. I've been talking to a friend and said things like, "I had a strange dream last night. There was this guy that was really scary, but at the same time, profound" and he said, "Oh, you're talking about *this* guy aren't you?" The same guy had been in his dream. It's beyond amazing, and I mean that in the truest sense I could possibly try to express. It's beyond amazing what happens in that realm. We're only just finger-tipping it, just getting the most cursory feel for that vast world. In that world, time doesn't exist; space doesn't exist. We can do anything. And that's what art's about—songwriting, in this particular case, and being able to share that with somebody. The deeper you go, the more profound it is. There's something there, and I'm quite sure it was there before we were born, and it'll exist after we die. Look at the words of Lennon and McCartney, for instance. Old John Boy, he's not here anymore, but when those songs are sung, he's alive. His window is open, and the character that came through him is here for us all to observe and to learn from and to feel and to know. It's not often that you get a chance to meet somebody, as an artist

where you just walk into a relationship like that. We didn't walk in—we pulled our way in—but, nonetheless, I think we both had a strong feeling that the door was open for us. And we had walked through it before we even knew it. And we were in that other world.

RITTER: Sometimes, when you write, you have a chance to be an explorer, and when you really get going, you can find a whole new continent that nobody else has found, and it's so fun—and that's how I felt. Here, suddenly, all of these places that are so exciting to see in your mind actually exist, and you can write about them. It was so exciting to do that together.

WEIR: We had only the slightest notion of where we were headed when we started crawling into this. I would imagine that we would both have in mind gunfi e, dogs and stuff li e that but, as it turned out, it became a more blue-collar deal. And then, on top of that, a good friend of mine was writing a book on the American quest and the frontier. He's a historian as well as an anthropologist, and he has a number of Ph.D.s, and he found that cowboys didn't have guns. None of that horseshit in the Westerns actually happened. None of it. Maybe there was a gunfight at the O.K. Corral, but it wasn't just a bunch of guys with guns all in one place. They may have had a shotgun for a deer or bird, but it likely stayed in one of the chase vehicles—one of the wagons that would follow with provisions—and it was used for bringing down gangs. They had dogs for their predators. I didn't even know this when we were finding our ay into this album—this sort of blue-collar ethos that we discovered. It introduced itself to us. We didn't go looking for it.

RITTER: When we fir t started, I was thinking a lot about Marty Robbins. It's so exciting. But, like you say, that's so interesting—that's not the way it was.



Weir and Kaufman previewing their new material at The Heath, which is nestled in New York's McKittrick Hotel, in early August.

WEIR: The western motif in the Dead came about because, when we fir t started off, we were all California boys—all Bay Area boys for that matter. Mickey [Hart] joined the band a few years in and he's from New York, but the rest of us had grown up in the Bay Area. San Francisco was the capital city of the American West all through the Gold Rush era, the Barbary Coast era and well into the 20th century. So, culturally, it was all right there. If you watch the old TV western *Have Gun – Will Travel,* the character there had his offic in San Francisco. So that tradition is just here—you can't escape it.

When we moved out of San Francisco into Marin County, north of San Rafael, in the late '60s, we were in ranching country—Novato, Central Marin and those places. People wore cowboy hats in town because they were working and needed to keep the sun off their head. That was the California we grew up in. I already had a slight fascination with cowboy songs because I learned them and wasn't gonna walk away from lessons that had damn near been beaten into me in the bunkhouse. If I understood and appreciated and felt like I could handle that aesthetic and presentation in a rock-and-roll band, then the guys would readily indulge me in that. And so they did.

Bob, you mentioned that these cowboy songs were reminiscent of a pre-radio oral tradition where ideas were openly traded and passed down between generations. Did that approach spur your interest in free, improvisational music?

WEIR: Well, in the bunkhouse, the guys weren't sticklers saying, "This is how the song goes," and if something happened and somebody had an ad-lib or a happy mistake and something new arose, that's the way it went from then on. That process wasn't free improv, certainly not by the Dead's standards, but it was loose. At the age of 15, that was improv enough for me and, at a given time, for instance, I'm not sure that I got all the chord changes right on all the songs that would accompany "old boy singing," but it was good enough for them. And, like I said, that was how the songs went for those guys after we were done doing them. I was the guy in the bunkhouse with a guitar, and if I wasn't hitting the chords I was supposed to be hitting, then I was gonna get hit.

Josh, you have offe ed your own spin on folk, Americana and country since you recorded your fir t album while attending Oberlin. What was your entry point into the Dead's music?

RITTER: I have a really profound memory, and it's actually one of my most treasured memories and one that I get a little emotional about because it was so important. Several years ago, there was a sickness in my family, and I had to leave right from a tour to come home to Idaho. It was Fourth of July and I rented a car and it was a beautiful summer night. I was driving through Palouse, Idaho, and all the farmland there. It was a beautiful place—the wheat was really high, the sky was pink and I was driving home with the windows open. I could smell the onions in the air and all the diffe ent things you pass on the field . I had the Grateful Dead on and it struck me: The thing I feel I have consistently learned from that music is the power of the moment—the moment you're listening, the moment you're a part of it. It's so strong and so engulfing that I don t know if I have ever experienced that with any other music. That was my way in.

As Bob was saying, that moment in music when you're all on the same page or you're all figuring it out is so amazing. I'd say listening to the Dead and listening to those moments is as close to being with your friends making music as you can get. And so, I'd say that was my way in and a big moment for me. It's like with cowboy music—it's the repartee and the telling of the story, and just some of the hijinks that get you to those places that are so great. That relates to the Dead, too. I feel like there is something strongly connected between the Dead and the idea of a moment, where everything is feeling just right.

WEIR: I get some of those moments when I'm listening to Hank Williams. He's a guy who takes me there. I also get some of those moments from John Coltrane, and there are certain writers in the American canon, or certain songs in the American canon, that take me there. And Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter are among those people. Maybe we'll be able to count ourselves as part

Sam Erickson

of that as well. There's sort of an American Zen aesthetic in the arts and it's very much so in music—and you know it when you hear it, and you know it when you see it. And we've had pretty good luck breaking into that.

Though he's not featured on the album, John Perry Barlow, a longtime Dead lyricist, figu es heavily into *Blue Mountain*'s story and you dedicate "Ki-Yi Bossie" to him. Before Barlow suffe ed a heart attack, you also originally hoped to have him and Gerrit Graham contribute to the album. Bob, can you talk about the time you spent with the Barlows back in your ranching days?

WEIR: John and his family opened that door and let me camp out in their bunkhouse for a summer or two, and then on down the line. In the later years, I actually bought into that ranch. But his health wasn't up to the project, so he sort of gave us his blessing to take it where we would have gone. I wanted to have him involved, but it didn't work out. Hopefully, he'll pull through—he's still having health problems—and we'll bring him in on a future project. But we had his blessing, and that's about as much as we can get from him. That, plus these were the kind of characters John could relate to.

RITTER: That's great. "Ki-Yi Bossie" is such an amazing song, and to hear how that came about and how it fits into this whole record—while also bringing something totally new to the whole thing—was great. I love that song so much. I got a chance to see some of the recording sessions. In some ways, I felt it was important for me, and important for our writing process, to be there for some of that. And I'll be honest: It's intimidating to work with somebody like Bob. But I got to go and see them working in the studio one time and it was awesome. There were all these people in the room—some I knew, some I didn't—from all from these bands that I respect and really love. To see everybody working in this way felt like this brand-new band forming. I have not played with a lot of diffe ent bands—I have my band—and to see this whole group of people all working together, it was great to see. It was so cool that Kaufman had this vision for the type of musicians that he thought would be really good.

Did you feel that the record's nomadic recording process influenced the album s overarching feel?

WEIR: For me, it didn't matter where we recorded. It was a matter of giving each of the songs a chance to breathe with whoever we had on hand. Josh Kaufman would plug people into the project, and this song would go this way, and that song would go that way. We would just play with whoever we had, and they were masterful at covering the songs this way or that. I'd think to myself, "When I'm here, I'm playing to hear what somebody has to offe , and see how can I relate to that and how they're gonna relate to what I just did."

We had a new band every day, and Josh Kaufman was the magical factor that would put the glue in the groove. He knew these guys, he knew what to expect, he knew they were gonna work, he knew they were gonna plug in. And each day in the studio was a diffe ent deal: "OK, we're gonna do this song and this song, and these are the guys we're plugging in and we'll just see what happens." He's a real good puppet master and, at the same time, he's dancing on the end of the strings on some songs. It worked out real well for us and, generally speaking, that got the job done.

RITTER: I totally agree. There were some times when I was trying to figu e out if Josh was trying to tell me something or not, and I kind of felt like, "I don't know what you're doing. I can't figu e it out, but it's working." Whatever it is you're saying to me, it's working.

Completist Meets Revisionist

BY JOSH KAUFMAN

Erstwhile Yellowbirds multi-instrumentalist Josh Kaufman, *Blue Mountain*'s producer and musical matchmaker, recaps his long, strange trip from Brooklyn to Bar Cross Ranch and back again.

I grew up steeped in the Hunter/Garcia and Barlow/Weir songbooks, and they still resonate with me so deeply. Their partnerships and blend of ideas are so apparent when you hear those songs—uncompromising on both the music and words. The collaborative nature is almost tactile, and it made me want to play a part in it, too. Matching Bob Weir and Josh Ritter made perfect sense to me. Ritter has always been a scholar of folklore—just like Hunter—and both Weir and Ritter love to spin yarns and tell tall stories. The characters and the destinations that color Ritter's songs are the same that dance around in the music of the Grateful Dead: Louis Collins, Cumberland, gamblers, girls named Rose, the Wild West and the deep expanse of the American landscape, all in metaphor and wrapped in allegory to help us put our own wandering existence into perspective.

The school of cowboy songs is so hard to touch without imagining a more retro sound—I never wanted that, and Weir didn't either. He's always been a fairly modern artist. (After all, he was pals with Rauschenberg and played a pink MIDI-Strat in the '80s.) We weren't interested in getting caught up in a hokey pastiche. He spent a lot of time covering those old gunfighter ballads to great awesomeness and approval with the Dead, and we both felt it was time to wake up the idiom and give it some new material. So, new songs were a major deal for all of us. (All of that said, who doesn't love Marty Robbins?)

It was really important for me to come to Bob with new songs, or at least the beginnings of them. Ritter sent six or so drafts of these amazing songs in that first batch. Weir couldn't have been more supportive of this collaboration and, since Josh and I have played and recorded so much music together, the dialogue was really open. We have a shorthand from working together over the years, and that really helped. Trust is always quite key. Bob and I would get together and work on songs whenever we could—three days here, a week there. He'd come to New York and I'd go through the Bay Area. We would write to what Ritter sent us and then, set up sessions to record whatever it was that we had. The idea of the album was secondary to just writing and collecting the recordings. Once we had a bunch of tracks, it was easier to say, "These 12 songs feel great together. I think we have a record."

The first song that Weir mentioned to Ritter and me was "Blue Mountain." It's one he remembers learning from back in his cowpoke days on a ranch up in Wyoming, and it was at the top of his bucket list of songs to record for this album. He could only remember the chorus: "Blue Mountain, you're azure deep/ Blue Mountain your sides are steep/ Blue Mountain, with a horse head on your side/ You've stolen my love to keep." He sang it, full voice, on a conference call with Ritter and me early on in the project. It sounded beautiful and exciting. Since he could only remember the chorus, all three of us wrote verses and mixed them up. We later found some of the "OG" lyrics somewhere and ended up keeping one of those verses as well. It's such a great song: Completist meets revisionist. It felt like we were making an actual album after Bob was overdubbing his vocals on "Cottonwood Lullaby." [The engineer] D. James Goodwin and I looked at each other with astonishment. His voice sounded like he'd been singing that song his entire life—so confident and full in his delivery.

The sessions were thrown together whenever Bob and I had time, in between touring and working on other projects, and that usually happened last minute. I'd check in with his manager, Matt Busch, and he'd give me a small window of Bob's availability. We'd go from there. Matt really helped with organizing all of the moving parts involved with this project, as well as being a sweet sounding board and sweet man to brainstorm with. He's a legend. If we were out West, then Bobby would call his buddies, and if we were in New York City, I'd call mine. Whichever songs Weir felt were close to being wrangled were the ones we tracked. Nobody was all that precious about who played on what. Bob had met and played with a bunch of the folks that I brought into the fold back in 2012 when he and HeadCount hosted "The Bridge Session." Because we tracked most of the record at various studios in the Hudson Valley, the majority of the record is New York folks. That said, we have a number of tracks that were recorded at TRI with Bob's friends—early demos of the songs as Bob was learning them and some alternate versions of things, as well as just plain outtakes and a handful that made the album. "Whatever Happened to Rose," "Lay My Lily Down," "Blue Mountain" and "Ki-Yi Bossie," which features Ramblin' Jack Elliott, are among those.

I see this album as part of Bob Weir's solo cannon: *Ace, Heaven Help the Fool* and *Blue Mountain*. Truthfully, I don't think they share all that much in common, other than they all deeply explore a really complex and powerfully creative dude with a ton of musical interests. It's such an honor and treat to work with both Ritter and Weir, not to mention all the incredible musicians that we pulled into the fold: Aaron Dessner, Scott Devendorf and Bryce Dessner from The National, Sam Cohen, Nate Martinez, Joe Russo, Jon Shaw, Ray Rizzo, The Bandana Splits, Rob Burger, Robin Sylvester, Jay Lane, Steve Kimock, Greg Calbi, Joe Gastwirt, Conrad Doucette and D. James Goodwin. They all really helped define the sound and feel of this record. The 16-year-old me is shitting his pants over this adventure.

LETTING IT FLY

It's been a slow, 16-year build for Blackberry Smoke, but these "fi e guys from Atlanta" are about to accelerate their path to success, thanks to their new album, *Like an Arrow*. BY ROB SLATER

"WE'VE FELT LIKE THE underdog for most of our career," Blackberry Smoke's Charlie Starr confirms as he checks in following a few weeks on the road with Gov't Mule in August. "It's an uphill battle," he admits, "which it is for all bands—unless you're the Stones."

But while Blackberry Smoke's rise through the ranks has been fraught with obstacles, the Atlanta-based quintet is on much firmer footing as the enter their 16th year as a band with their dynamic new record, *Like an Arrow*.

A band's journey often begins with a name and, in this case, that process can be traced back to their formative days in Atlanta and an inspired idea from Chris Robinson.

"Chris Robinson did name the band, yes," Starr confirms when asked if that story was true. "My drummer, Brit Turner, has known Chris for years. We all have." Starr recounts one particular booze-soaked night hanging around Robinson and his Black Crowes bandmates when they were kicking around ideas for their moniker.

"Naming a band is fucking hard," Starr jokes. "All the good ones are taken.

"So Chris was over for about a 24-hour period—there was some partying going on, and he kept coming up with these silly suggestions," he continues. "Finally, he said, 'What about The Blackberry Smoke?' All of a sudden, that didn't seem so silly."

Dropping "The" from Robinson's not-so-silly suggestion, the ragtag group—which also includes Richard Turner (bass), Paul Jackson (guitar) and Brandon Still (keyboards)—got started down a decidedly blue-collar path. The band earned its stripes by gigging hard in the early years and working toward its fir t record, which arrived in 2004 in the form of *Bad Luck Ain't No Crime*.

It's a fitting titl , looking back, as Starr and Blackberry Smoke wouldn't experience a surplus of good fortune initially, bouncing from label to label for their fir t three albums. First it was Cock of the Walk, then BamaJam (for 2009's *Little Piece of Dixie)* and Zac Brown's Southern Ground (for 2012's *The Whippoorwill)*.

"We've been involved with these labels that have fallen apart," Starr reflect . But landing with Brown's budding organization and Southern Ground brand felt like a new start for the band.

"Any time someone who is successful shows interest in working with us, it's exciting," Starr explains as he talks about joining up with Brown's operation, and even hopping on a tour with Zac Brown Band. "At the time, we had no home, so it was perfect timing."

The Whippoorwill offe ed Blackberry Smoke their fir t extended taste of success. The record peaked at No. 8 on the country charts and moved over 50,000 units, introducing the band to the world of country music. With *The Whippoorwill,* Blackberry Smoke got some help from Brown (who earned a writing credit on "Crimson Moon") as well as ZBB associate Clay Cook (who infamously ditched Berklee College of Music with John Mayer to move to Atlanta and start a band). "The fans let you know which [record] is their favorite and that has long been our touchstone," Starr also notes. "And that's fin ."

However, despite those achievements, the record label curse followed the band to Southern Ground, which dissolved in 2015.

"The Beatles couldn't even make it work, you know?" Starr quips about artists starting their own labels. "Zac's a great guy and he's a great friend, but he saw how hard it could be. He had his hands full being Zac Brown, and I think the last thing that he could find himself doing would be micromanaging a label while he's busy touring the world and selling millions of records. Far be it from me to know how to make something like that work."

He sums it up with an understandable amount of resignation: "We had a good time there. We made a good record and went on a couple long jaunts with Zac. It was good."

While Blackberry Smoke

Richard Turner, Brit Turner, Charlie Starr, Paul Jackson, Brandon Still (l-r)

Jason Thrasher

may have been without a home for their next record, which wouldn't come out until 2015, the group experienced expansive musical growth in this time, stretching into the jamband realm and firmly planting their feet in the country-rock world, thanks to the success of *The Whippoorwill*.

One of those jamband connections came about during a 2013 visit to Bob Weir's TRI Studios in San Rafael, Calif., where they got a chance to play with the Grateful Dead guitarist. A self-admitted "huge Dead fan," Starr was thrilled to be invited to play Weir's high-tech studio.

"We asked Bob if he wanted to jam with us, so we just went down a list of songs and threw together a jam," he says of the impromptu musical meeting that turned into much more than the group had anticipated. "It was a marathon. I think we wound up playing for sixteen hours."

Starr, who notes that his wife saw about 38 Dead shows while attending the University of Georgia, welcomed Weir to join Blackberry Smoke for tunes like "Ramble on Rose," "Deep Elem Blues" and The Band's "Up on Cripple Creek." The guitarist vows that the performance will eventually see the light of day. (Weir and Blackberry Smoke revisited their collaboration at Sweetwater Music Hall in Mill Valley, Calif., in April of 2014.)

While the performance itself was a clear career highlight, what Starr remembers most about his time at TRI was the conversation afterward with Weir and longtime Dead roadie Steve Parish.

"[They] told stories about touring the South, playing Atlanta and playing shows with [the Allman] Brothers in the early '70s, and the whole Watkins Glen thing," he remembers. "I had a buddy who took some photos of them at RFK Stadium when the Brothers and the Dead played. I showed Bob a couple of those photos and he was like, 'Oh, my God, it was so hot that day and I was so glad the Brothers went on in the sunshine because you couldn't keep an instrument in tune.'"

Between *The Whippoorwill* and their fourth record, 2015's *Holding All the Roses*, Blackberry Smoke continued to build on their Grateful Dead, Lynyrd Skynyrd and Allman Brothers influence while also embracing their newfound popularity on the other side of the country divide. That formula proved to be successful: The band teamed with producer Brendan O'Brien, known for producing six of Pearl Jam's studio albums and earning credits for his work with Springsteen, AC/DC, Dylan, Neil Young and the band who gave Blackberry Smoke their name, The Black Crowes. *Holding All the Roses* went to No. 1 on the country charts and No. 7 on the rock charts.

"He is an old Atlanta guy and we shared a lot of the same friends," Starr says of the decision to work with O'Brien. "He was on our short list every time we made a record, and we were never able to get him. He came to a show at the House of Blues in Los Angeles and he said, 'Man, I know your band. I'm in your band. Hell, this is the kind of music I've played my entire life.'"

The initial burst of chemistry led to a recording process that Starr calls "a great experience," and ultimately culminated in a crossover country smash at a time when Nashville's Music Row controls the charts. Blackberry Smoke, Jason Isbell and Sturgill Simpson have bucked that trend, however, bouncing back with their own respective chart-toppers.

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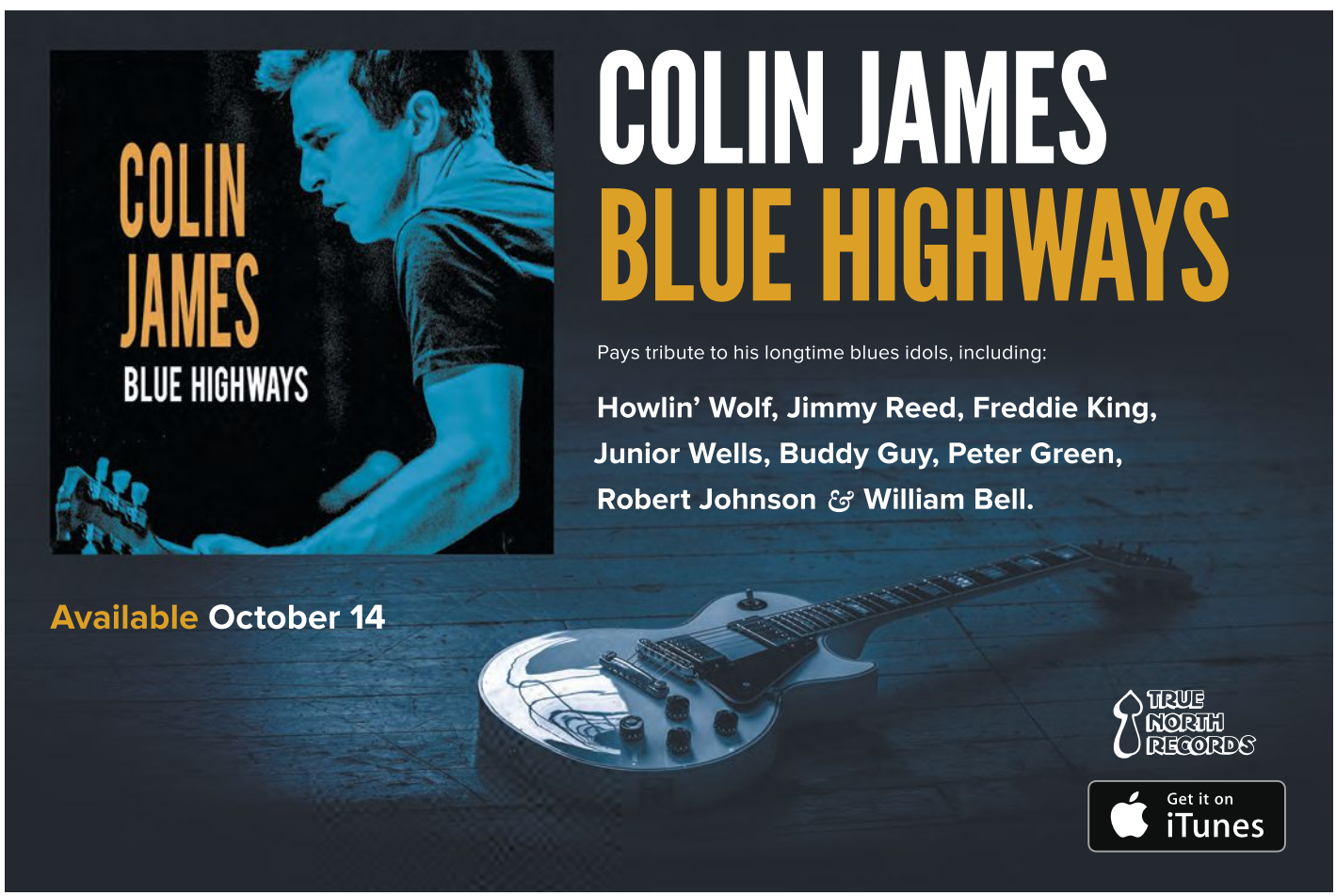

THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

St. Paul & The Broken Bones return with a modern soul album that shares more than just stories of heartache.

BY DEAN BUDNICK

"IT'S ONLY GONNA GET WEIRDER," St. Paul & The Broken Bones frontman Paul Janeway says of the music that he expects will flow from his group over the years and albums to come.

The band's second record, *Sea of Noise*, is already a step in that direction.

The ethereal opening piece, "Crumbling Light Posts, Pt. 1," announces itself in an altogether different way from the brass-infused slice of soul that began the group's debut, *Half the City*. Janeway and a guest choir intone, "We're just crumbling light, crumbling light in a sea of noise," for the first of three such sequences on the album. "Crumbling Light Posts" also appears in the middle and at the end, serving as atmospheric tent poles.

These lyrics are drawn from British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's book, *The Grand Alliance: The Second World War*, in which Churchill describes ailing American politician Harry Hopkins, an advisor to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as "a soul that flamed out of a frail and failing body. He was a crumbling lighthouse from which there shone the beams that led great fleets to the harbor."

This quote was the starting point for Janeway, who modified the imagery to reflect some of the challenges of the modern age, which is a recurring theme throughout the album. "In my mind, it's not a total concept record," he explains, "but there are some common themes and some conceptual, binding ideas. As we experience life in the era of the laptop, you can feel like you're eventually going to get sucked in. You're going to fall and become noise."

Janeway's longtime collaborator and St. Paul & The Broken Bones co-founder/bassist Jesse Phillips adds, "The idea is to represent the individual in the modern world full of distraction and influence and information manipulation, where you're trying to maintain humanity and identity and do what's right, even though you're exposed to everything that surrounds you via the cable news and internet news cycles."

These sentiments are in stark contrast with the musings on love and heartache that predominated on the group's first album. Indeed, this is not your mother's St. Paul & The Broken Bones.

Except that it is. And it's your great aunt's and your little cousin's, too—a fact that has not gone unnoticed by the band, which has demonstrated the unique ability to span generations in its appeal.

"It's bizarre: We've had grandmothers and granddaughters come out to our shows," Janeway reflects. "We played a festival outside of D.C., called Sweetlife. It was Kendrick Lamar, The Weeknd, and all this other stuff, including us. We had a great show, and, I'll never forget, on the screen it said, 'For parent pick up, go to this aisle.' It was an odd feeling for me but a really good one. It's crazy, but I think that writing real songs and having real music is never going to go out of fashion. And when you see someone giving everything they've got, you can feel it. That's what we aspire to do."

Phillips concurs: "The joke in our band is that what we lack in finesse, we make up for with effort. In that respect, there's a modern energy and edge and immediacy to the music that younger folks can latch on to, so there is a cross-demographic appeal—especially when somebody sees the live show, where we've got all these elements with the retro and the modern vibes present at once. When you see the band, it's hard to tell if it's a soul band with some rock-and-roll influence or a rock-and-roll band desperately trying to be a soul band."

The eight-piece outfit typically appears nattily dressed in ties and jackets, and then Janeway delivers a forceful performance in which he works the stage (and sometimes bounds into the crowd) in an active, demonstrative manner that seemingly runs counter to the band's formal attire. In so doing, the unit nods to the sounds and spirits of Memphis and Motown, as well as Muscle Shoals, located in the band's native Alabama.

However, Janeway believes that some of the group's reference points are overlooked. "Our live show has got way more punk-rock elements to it than we get credit for," he says.

* * *

THE GROUP'S ORIGINS certainly reflect a broader palette and intent. Janeway first met Phillips in Birmingham, when the bass player was invited to join Janeway's debut group, The Secret Dangers. The vocalist had grown up 30 miles away in the small town of Chelsea, Ala., while Phillips, who was raised in the southeastern corner of British Columbia, had recently arrived from New Orleans, where he had studied music at Tulane and Loyola. ("I was pretty fresh to Alabama. I had moved here chasing a job and a girl," Phillips says. "I didn't know a lot of people. I was in my mid-20s doldrums and I was pretty much down for anything.")

Janeway was introduced to Phillips by the drummer in his nascent group, who worked with the bassist at an area music store. "Jesse came in and we just really hit it off," Janeway recalls. "I brought him over to my apartment to see my records and, after I showed him Talking Heads' *Remain in Light*, he said, 'We're going to be really good friends.' He was right. That was about eight or nine years ago, and we've been really, really close since then."

Tom Waits is another foundational artist for Janeway, who had aspired to become a minister and grew up with only minimal knowledge of secular musicians until he broke with the church at age 18 (he's now 33) and began actively discovering new sounds. Phillips describes him as "one of the biggest music fans I knew. He didn't care about the scene; he was just a huge music nerd. He was in the absolute depths of his Tom Waits obsession in 2008 when the *Glitter and Doom* tour came to Birmingham. Paul showed up, went straight to the merch table and literally bought everything on the table. I don't even think he had a job at this point."

As for The Secret Dangers, Phillips remembers, "It was kind of alternative blues. The project went through a bunch of different members searching for the appropriate calibration. Some of the building blocks were there for what we're doing now, but we could never really get the vibe right. I don't think we had too many serious aspirations about it. We were serious enough to rehearse every week on the button, but it was mostly a basement band. We had fun just hanging out in the basement and making stuff up."

The group was a classic-rock four-piece. Unlike the outfit that followed, there were no horns, the musicians did not

St. Paul & The Broken Bones: Chad Fisher, Allen Branstetter, Jason Mingledorff, Browan Lollar, Paul Janeway, Al Gamble, Andrew Lee, Jesse Phillips (l-r)

David McClister

appear in dapper dress and Janeway found himself tethered to a guitar, adding rhythm to the mix. "The reason I don't play guitar in this band is because I ruined the guitar I played in that band," he reveals. "I would stand up on amps and fall over and roll around on the ground. Later, I decided, 'You know, if I'm gonna do this, I shouldn't ruin any instruments.'

"We only played one show outside of Alabama," Janeway continues. "It was the first band I'd ever been in, so I was happy just to have friends. It never really had any aim. I never thought, 'Maybe I should practice songs around my voice.' We did some Zeppelin covers, which I didn't know because I didn't grow up with that. It had alternative-rock-type elements to it, it had some more soulful stuff, it was a kaleidoscope of things."

The legacy of The Secret Dangers was the burgeoning friendship between Janeway and Phillips. By 2011, Janeway had entered an area college and met the woman he would marry, while Phillips had started playing with a psych-pop band called The Grenadines. Still, the two remained friends and, thanks to an offer from local musician Les Nuby, who had just opened Ol' Elegante Studios in nearby Homewood, the pair began to meet each week with the intent of creating one final document of their musical relationship before they moved on to other endeavors.

Phillips characterizes these sessions as "an excuse to hang out. Every Wednesday night, we'd go down to the studio and have a boys' night. We'd listen to records and make some noise. It wasn't like we were in too big of a hurry. We threw a bunch of stuff at the wall to figure out what stuck. I think it probably took us between six and nine months to have four songs almost done. At the end of it, Paul had just gotten a Pell Grant and a financial-aid package at the college, which he used to pay for a block of time for us to finish those tunes. Toward the end of that, we started bringing other guys in to help us finish, which became the genesis of the band."

The four songs caught the ear of Alabama Shakes touring keyboardist Ben Tanner, who mixed what became their debut EP. Tanner then produced the group's ensuing full-length, which was released via Single Lock Records, the label Tanner founded with John Paul White (The Civil Wars) and Will Trapp. The band's lineup further coalesced during the making of *Half the City* with the addition of organ player Al Gamble, originally hired solely for the recording and later invited to join the group once their touring schedule allowed for it. (The initial roster also featured former Jason Isbell 400 Unit guitarist Browan Lollar, drummer Andrew Lee, trumpeter Allen Branstetter and Ben Griner on trombone.)

On the strength of *Half the City*, and the group's dynamic performances in support of it, St. Paul & The Broken Bones rocketed from local initiates to national sensations. They achieved Janeway's two goals for the group early on by appearing at Bonnaroo and the Ryman Auditorium in 2014. From there, they claimed additional choice festival spots, performed on *The Late Show with David Letterman* and even opened two stadium dates for The Rolling Stones. (Phillips describes the Atlanta show as "a pretty surreal day. We drove to that one because we were home in Birmingham—imagine *putt, putt, puttering* up to a football stadium in your little white 15-passenger van, driving up to security and squeaking out, 'Hi, we're playing here today.'")

In the midst of all this, the band refined its sartorial tastes and cut a welcome deal with a dry-cleaning service. "Paul's been wearing a suit from the outset," Phillips explains. "At the beginning, he was going to wear a bow tie, but he had problems with a choking, gagging feeling, so he dropped it eventually. The band gradually decided that we couldn't look like total scrubs if Paul was going to dress in a suit, so we made an effort as well. Over time, we started getting deals on custom suits and, recently, we've been looking pretty sharp. Still, it was tough when we were just in a van and didn't have a trailer yet because all the suits had to sit inside with us, and they smelled so bad because there's so much sweat involved. When we got a trailer, it altered things from a smell perspective very favorably because the suits could ride back there. We have one of the weirdest endorsements any band probably has, with a local business called Hunter's Cleaners. When we come off tour, we just dump stuff there. They take care of it for us, give it back to us and send us on our way."

* * *

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HAS it that musicians have their whole life to make their first album and then six months to make their second. However, the St. Paul &The Broken Bones narrative is anything but conventional. The process of writing and recording *Half the City* had been truncated given Ben Tanner's limited availability due to his commitments with the Alabama Shakes. So when Janeway, Phillips and the band began to contemplate their follow-up, they took some time to reflect on what they hoped to accomplish with their sophomore record.

"The first album was done in such a time constraint, and with such urgency, that we didn't really have time to think about anything," Janeway acknowledges. "We recorded it in three days and mixed it in two. Even though there were some musical ideas floating out there, we wrote 75 percent of the record in three weeks. This time, I sat down for months working on the lyrics alone, and really thought about what I wanted to say. The first one afforded us so many opportunities, but we didn't

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4 FRIENDS FROM VERMONT

Phish blaze on with a new, deeply personal album—and one very 'big boat.'

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

TREY ANASTASIO knows *that* feeling when you catch a band in their prime. It was the summer of '99 and Phish had traveled to Japan, for the fir t time, to perform at the Fuji Rock Festival. Rage Against the Machine, who were riding their own wave of success as a politically charged, hip-hop/rock alternative to late-'90s complacency, were headlining on another stage. The only problem was that Phish were going up against the start of their set.

"We stopped playing; we just stopped playing," Anastasio says with a laugh, reemphasizing his wording with a repetitive beat. "I put my guitar down and said, 'Tell everyone we're taking a break because Rage Against the Machine is playing.' I had a pass to stand side-stage, and I watched them walk by and do their little huddle—they just came on and kicked ass. That was their moment." He thinks back even further to another overseas gig when Phish was touring in Europe and popped into Denmark to play Roskilde in '92. They ended up catching a whiff of "teen spirit" at the height of the Nirvana revolution.

"The same thing—the whole festival stopped. Everybody stopped," he continues. "That was the year that Denmark beat Germany in the [UEFA European Football Championship]. They actually stopped the whole festival until Denmark won—they even held Nirvana. The place went crazy and everybody walked over to Nirvana."

Anastasio is sitting in a café near his Uptown New York apartment a few weeks before his 52nd birthday, snacking on a quiche and sipping his second cup of coffe , which he apologetically says will make him a bit chatty. The quaint space has special meaning for him as well: One of his daughter's friends recently used the poetry-themed restaurant as a temporary offi , writing a novel in a nook near the cash register while she was studying at Columbia University. His eyes light up as he describes her process.

The Phish guitarist has always been fascinated by the creation and distribution of various artistic mediums, and says he still writes and works on music every day. But it's a topic that he's particularly interested in as he prepares to embark on a tour with his longtime bandmates—keyboardist Page McConnell, bassist Mike Gordon and drummer Jon Fishman—a few days after they release *Big Boat*, their 13th album and second project with legendary producer Bob Ezrin, who also helmed the sessions for Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

Not surprisingly, *Big Boat* is among Phish's most refined records, a quasi-concept piece and true LP that touches on heady topics like loss, aging, domestic life, community and friendship, and makes use of Ezrin's studio and gadgetry like few of their previous records have before. It's also still very much a genre-jumping Phish album, filled with enough inside jokes and musical hijinks—as well as one very pronounced "rage with Page" rallying call—to feel in line with a band whose big summer thread involved quoting the phrase "ass handed" during their live shows.

"If we've been derivative in the past, then *Big Boat* feels very original to me," McConnell says a few days later from his Vermont home. "This one sounds less to me like other Phish records. In fact, it doesn't remind me of any other album, including other Phish albums. I like that uniqueness. Our albums are often known for their mix of styles but, this time, the cohesiveness comes to the forefront a bit more."

Big Boat arrives at a unique place in Phish's already unusual arc, too. It's the fir t album released after all four members passed the 50-year mark and the fir t they recorded in the wake of Anastasio's participation in last year's Fare Thee Well celebration, which served as both an encore and a new beginning for the Grateful Dead family. It's also been over seven years since Phish reunited, following a fi e-year breakup that found all four band members exploring myriad projects and battling their own demons. As the novelty of their high-profile eunion has faded, the members of Phish have started to think about their next phase as songwriters and recording artists, while unintentionally embracing their role as the last classic-rock act, the fir t modern jamband and the uncredited godfathers of 21st-century indie rock.

René Huemer

"What changed, starting in 2009, is this clarity of vision and this feeling that it was a precious gift that the four of us met," Anastasio says. "It took a couple of years after that for things to get rolling completely, but we've realized how important this is for everyone—the way that the primary relationship between the four of us is nurtured and the way that ripples out into the rest of our families and the community. We communicate. The four of us are texting many times a day."

His thoughts turn to Phish's headlining sets at Arrington, Va.'s Lockn' Festival and their annual Labor Day throwdown at Dick's Sporting Goods Park in Commerce City, Colo., a few weeks ago. "Fish used to describe our improv in terms of this 'lifeboat' concept—if somebody falls in the water, everyone reaches over and pulls him back in," Anastasio continues. "I know I've experienced that personally with the band, where the other guys have pulled me back in. After Lockn' and Dick's, I was thinking about our crew, who never come out and take a bow but literally make the show happen, and all the people in the audience who are beloved members of our Phish family. This 'big boat' philosophy is more appropriate than ever. There's room for everyone."

* * *

BIG BOAT MARKS THE FIRST time that Phish have worked with the same producer on two consecutive records—not counting their studio partnership with Bryce Goggin on either side of their 2000-2002 hiatus—and their new 13-song LP is a continuation of the conversation that started with their previous release, *Fuego*. That album began with a series of unique full-band writing exercises, which produced some of the most collaborative material in the group's now 30-plus-year history. Ezrin helped refine those songs and few other new originals, most of which the band dropped for the fir t time during their Halloween show in 2013, and *Fuego* was released the following June. "My whole life, I've always written with whoever was sitting at the table," Anastasio says, noting his lifelong friendship with Tom Marshall and describing their early days working out songs at suburban sanctuaries in New Jersey, like their favorite rhombus sculpture and the fountain where the guitarist composed "Runaway Jim." "Getting together to write before *Fuego* was like lighting a fi e. It didn't matter what we came up with—I liked the social aspect, the unity."

After wrapping up the sessions, Ezrin encouraged the members of the Vermont quartet to learn 10 folk songs on acoustic instruments, internalize them, forget them and then start writing material on their own. "After *Fuego* was over, Bob told us he wanted to know a little more about us," he continues. "He said, 'Who are you guys? What breaks your heart?' He was trying to make a point—for a band where the meter has, at times, moved toward the head, he'd love to tilt the compass toward the heart."

Though Phish's music has the ability to open a poetic third eye, and has inspired more than a few yearbook quotes and social-media status updates, their lyrics have rarely been direct. Yet, miraculously, everyone followed through with the exercise; one song, McConnell's bluegrass-esque "Things People Do" even made the final cut. Ana tasio says he took particular inspiration

from the Carter Family, while McConnell's deep-dive started with the folk revival of the '50s and '60s, before he entered a wormhole that led him back to the 1600s and 1700s. Gordon, who has the deepest background in bluegrass and old-time music, decided to study a few songs from every decade of the past 100 years.

"For me, life is about learning," the bassist says while sitting in his wife's offi in Vermont. "At a certain point, you turn off the learning an just get into the fl w. I don't know if I saw the golden secret that connected all of those songs—Bob suggested a couple of jazz songs, a couple of folk ones and a couple of poppier ones—but I'm glad I did the exercise."

Even Fishman, who has never been one for homework, followed Ezrin's instructions and came up with his folk-inspired nugget, "Ass Handed," during "the confluence o a particularly difficult y with the need to fulfill ou producer's assignment." The short, quick romp, which surfaced a few times on this summer's tour, features "one line repeated three diffe ent ways."

"It took me one second to write, in a moment of inspiration," Fishman explains. "If you look at the whole history of everything I've written, played, said and done, then there's an argument to be made that it all boils down to, in one way or another, 'You get your ass handed to you every day.' Furthermore, I believe the same can be said for anything I write, play, say and do for the rest of time. It's just taken me 51 years to finally s y what I mean concisely."

* * *

PHISH RECORDED *BIG BOAT* somewhat nomadically, from the fall of 2015 through this past August, tracking the album in Ezrin's Nashville studio and working on songs at Anastasio's fabled Barn, Gordon and McConnell's personal recording spaces and Avatar Studios in New York. Anastasio would fl down to Nashville for overdubs while Fishman focused his energies on the campaign trail, stumping for Vermont hero and presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders. Phish continued to play in fits and tarts but, for the fir t time since 2004's similarly studio-focused *Undermind*, they shied away from playing a sizable portion of *Big Boat*'s songs live.

In total, the band ended up with over 40 originals to sort through. Some numbers were older ideas that they had repurposed to fit the album s overall vibe, like "Home"—a deeply personal, end-of-tour meditation written by McConnell that dips from a bouncy, organic, pop nugget into a spooky, funky, keyboard-led jam—and Anastasio's stripped-down "Running Out of Time." Others, like the breezy, horn-infused "Breath and Burning," which Anastasio wrote on the beach after Phish's destination event in Mexico earlier this year, emerged later in the process. "Tide Turns," a somewhat descendant of the Stones' *Exile* period, also makes use of Anastasio's brass section, and the instant favorite "No Men in No Man's Land" is, simply put, pure Phish funk. They took another stab at writing as a group, too, but none of the material from those sessions ultimately made the record.

Anastasio says a few road-tested songs like "Mercury," "Shade" and "Let's Go" were recorded but scrapped; he'd love to include "Mercury," a personal favorite, on an album of never-recorded concert showstoppers like "Harry Hood," "Mike's Song," "Tela" and "Colonel Forbin's Ascent," that, in true prankster fashion, would need to be called *Rarities*.

"Bob's very good at helping us craft our songs," McConnell says, noting the uncharacteristically autobiographical nature of the *Big Boat* tracks, many of which openly look back on late-night parties and other debaucherous, fun times. "Especially with *Fuego*, he'd encourage us to push ourselves lyrically and to really find meaning and writ about things with a little bit more feeling. So I approached this one thinking, 'What would Bob want?'"

McConnell, who has never had more than one solo writing credit on a Phish record, jokes that he tripled his output this time around, also offerin the proggy, electro "I Always Wanted It This Way," an album highlight and one of the most studio-sounding songs that Phish have ever released. "I spent about a year and a half just trying to write songs, and that was something I had never done before," says McConnell, who mentions he brought another batch of songs to the table that didn't make *Big Boat*. "I wanted to stay close to home, made a real effort t write and worked at it. That was my focus, other than my family and the band."

For Anastasio, the process of writing more direct lyrics yielded a few surprises. "If you write very specifically abou something, it becomes more universal and you go to other places," he says. "There's a couple of songs on the new album, like 'Miss You,' that were, at the moment, about a certain person—every syllable true—but I would never want it to be glued to that person by any stretch of the imagination." He thinks back to the *Fuego* single "The Line," which was written about Darius Washington Jr., the University of Memphis basketball star who blew a big tournament game.

"We pulled up a picture of him from the internet after already knowing what the concept of the song was gonna be about—a person who had publicly crashed and burned, which I have recently done," Anastasio says, referencing his 2006 arrest. "I stumbled and fell and collapsed in front of a large group of people, and I wanted to access that feeling. The experience of failure turned out to be a gift—I wanted to write a song that expressed that feeling from my perspective. I could relate to a lot of Darius' story, even his relationship with his dad—I had a dad who was a coach when I was growing up.

"But the more we kept it specific to him and to tha moment, the more universal the sentiment felt to me," Anastasio continues. "And the less I thought about his experience at all when singing it—to the point where I sort of regretted revealing that fact. You learn all sorts of things you never thought you would when you go through an experience like that. And though the details are diffe ent for each person, everybody on earth goes through things like that on a daily basis."

He pauses and mentions reading a similar statement by Jimmy Webb. (Trey Anastasio Band recently added Webb's song "MacArthur Park" to their arsenal.) "You learn all kinds of things you were never going to learn—no matter how hard it is in the moment," he says, describing Webb's philosophy.

Gordon's songwriting contributions have increased ever since he found a steady writing partner in Max Creek guitarist Scott Murawski, who serves as the co-pilot of his eponymous solo project. The old friends have refined their process through a mix of writing sessions that have ranged from weekend getaways to group exercises and, more recently, weekly Wednesday-night Skype calls where they trade ideas in real time. Their contribution to *Big Boat*, "Waking Up Dead," moves through several distinct sections; one feels in line with Gordon's clever "Access Me," while another rubs up against Radiohead's "Paranoid Android." Their involved process included inspirations that ranged from a jam with John Morgan Kimock to a few lyrics written by Gordon's niece, who was interning for Phish, and a "double u" chant the bassist frequently sang around his house. The song also grew out of an experiment: Gordon recorded over 100 ideas for his various projects into Ableton, in real time, and then placed all the files into a single screen before editing them down.

"It's tough for a young band these days," Anastasio admits. "It's easy for someone to say: 'Why should I go out when I have the whole season of Orange Is the New Black *and a pair of headphones?'"*

"It's important to have some songs that see the light of day because, when one does, they can enjoy the full circle and learn from the experience of what makes a certain song work," says Gordon, who also mentions that some of his new compositions may surface on the solo album he's recording. "So much of it is subconscious and emotional when it comes to songs, and there are so few words in each song to get across huge ideas. It's like magic. I like to see it through."

Gordon also describes Phish's democratic process as stronger than ever. "Trey and the other band members were talking about *Who's Next*, one of my favorite Who albums, and it doesn't matter what songs are on it, let alone who wrote those songs. It just has that *feel*. Some people don't even know that Trey wrote 'Strange Design' and 'Velvet Sea' because Page sings them."

* * *

FLIPPING THE CLASSIC ROCK storyline of musicians findin fame in the city before fleein to the country to dream big, Anastasio is now a little more than a decade into his New York period, after living in bucolic Vermont for 20-plus years. He has fond memories of taking his fir t guitar lessons in Manhattan at age 14 and traveling by train from his hometown of Princeton, N.J., to visit Times Square. He loves the city's cultural blend and being able to walk over to the Beacon Theatre to catch musicians like Nick Cave on a whim. Lately, he's also returned to the Great White Way, working on his now-shuttered musical, *Hands on a Hardbody* and attending the breakout Broadway sensation *Hamilton* as many times as he can. As he pulls up a cast recording on his phone that TAB trumpeter Jen Hartswick sent him, he notes *Hamilton* drummer Andrés Forero's contributions to *Big Boat*'s hashtag-ready signature track, "Blaze On," and its 13-plus-minute climax, "Petrichor."

Anastasio built the multi-part orchestral epic "Petrichor" piecemeal over the course of a few years and debuted it with the Oregon Symphony in 2014. The song's demo piqued Ezrin's interest during the *Fuego* sessions; however, as Anastasio says, "the winds weren't blowing that way. But when he came back on day one of this album project, the fir t question he asked was: 'Have you done anything with that one yet? No other band is recording anything like it.'" The guitarist sees the song as part of a thread that stretches back to Phish's debut, *Junta*, which included compositional works like "You Enjoy Myself," "The Divided Sky," "Foam" and "Esther." He also sees it as the thematic bookend to the album's opening track, Fishman's John Bonham-esque rocker "Friends."

"It was a concept that came up really early," he continues. "'Friends,' then 'Breath and Burning,' and ending with 'More' and 'Petrichor'—with the skies opening and the lattice coming down, which, to me, felt like they were coming from the returning ship."

Big Boat's title is lifted from a line in "Friends," which deals with the dichotomy of "still having fun" as the world slowly crumbles and, as Fishman says, "a spaceship solar system." The drummer currently lives in Maine with his fi e children, and he started working on "Friends" before *Big Boat*'s sessions commenced. The punky track is his way of laying out his thoughts on "science, religion, space, other life, and the juxtaposition of our high intelligence occurring simultaneously with astounding, shortsighted ignorance—how every time we think we know something, it's only a matter of time before we find out h w wrong we are," all in the confines of t o verses and a chorus.

"I have always held the belief that the idea that we are the only life in the universe is possibly the stupidest thing we've ever thought as a species," the drummer says. "It's possibly our most ignorant oversight, as evidenced by the fact that, right at the dawn of our ability to finally se planets in other solar systems, we observed that some hold serious promise for life—and one of the most promising ones is even right next door in our own galaxy. However, as a species, we are still in a place where, if a fiery arri al of an object from the sky were to actually occur, there are a large number of us that would be more likely to attribute it to a supernatural intervention than a perfectly logical, physical event. This is partially due to the stultifying effect eligion has had on reason, but also just due to our tendency to think we're such hot shit."

And Anastasio sees the song's meaning spilling over to other songs on the album. "There's the rain, floodin and everything—which is a bit apocalyptic and certainly relevant to these crazy times we live in," he says. "Each day, it's another news story about glaciers melting, floods or fires. I even read a story recently that said it's become unhealthy to live next to the ocean because the algae is gonna kill you. There's no food left that's safe to eat."

"Though we weren't setting out to make a concept album, there were some conversations where the 'big boat' was imagined as a spaceship, like a modern Noah's ark, coming to save a dying planet," Gordon adds, describing an almost biblical day of reckoning. "I had this passing idea that when the boat got there, it was only two inches wide and couldn't fi all the Noah's ark pairings."

Meanwhile, Fishman explains: "I imagine if some mothership-type situation were to actually be possible, it might be because [someone] had figu ed out how to engineer their very solar system into a rig that might be able to move with an intended direction through space. And that coming in contact with such a species—were we to survive it—might make us realize that we are, and have always been, standing on our own mothership. It's already—as a whole—drifting, rudderless through space like a macro-version of a big oxygen atom, with the sun as its nucleus and eight—sorry Pluto—planetary 'electrons' revolving around it.

"We currently use gravity and orbital patterns to catapult and steer objects like satellites through space," he continues.

René Huemer

"What changed, starting in 2009, is this clarity of vision and this feeling that it was a precious gift that the four of us met," Anastasio says. "It took a couple of years after that for things to get rolling completely, but we've realized how important this is for everyone."

"What if we figu ed out how to use those same forces to steer [Earth] itself? That's the 'big boat' at the end of the second verse, where our ignorance about being alone is lifted, opening up all kinds of possibilities and causing us to view the very earth we've been standing on this whole time as a vehicle for those possibilities."

Fishman was particularly inspired by the movie *Apocalypto*, which explores the idea that, in the context of world history, the concept of "home-field ad antage" is "only maybe true in sports, but certainly not in war and conquest. If that dot on the horizon shows up one day in your field of vision, it might not be a good thing. I imagined what it would mean if some astronomer were looking out at the ever-expanding universe and noticed that one of those many points of light out there was actually moving toward us. That's the 'big boat' in the fir t verse."

"Great music almost always follows tumultuous moments, which this is," Anastasio says, discussing the current cultural climate and drawing parallels to the big bands of the '20s. "I can't wait for whoever is gonna come out of all the social upheaval that is happening right now—it's probably gonna be good."

* * *

SHORTLY BEFORE PHISH STARTED digging into *Big Boat*, Anastasio joined the surviving members of the Grateful Dead for their Fare Thee Well performances, which brought the entire psychedelic-rock world to new cultural heights. McConnell attended all three Chicago dates, checking out the shows from the crowd or near the soundboard, and says that "seeing Trey up there playing really reinvigorated my fandom." He started listening to the Dead's SiriusXM channel regularly, and their songwriting continued to move him while working on *Big Boat*.

"I'd talk to Trey while he was rehearsing, and I would tell him about playing with the members of The Meters," McConnell says of what may have been his own heir-apparent moment. The keyboardist, who toured with The Meter Men on occasion between 2012-2015, admits that playing with his heroes increased his confidenc , especially when it comes to the organ.

Fare Thee Well spilled over into one of Phish's most celebrated summer runs in years. Though "Blaze On" shares some fond memories with the Dead chestnut "Man Smart (Woman Smarter)," Anastasio says "Mercury," a tale of cosmic perspective that he started during a trip to North Carolina's Outer Banks with Marshall, is the most direct result of that unique experience. But his time at "Dead Camp" inspired him in more profound ways also.

"What I learned was: 'Be nice. Be kind to your friends while they are here,'" Anastasio says. "I plan on being here a lot longer, and the four of us are still in great shape, but sometimes we will look around and say, 'God, how many bands who have been around for 33 years have all their original members? It is going to end someday.'" He pauses and continues, "It's a good thing, but you start to become aware and take stock—just statistically, you can take any four men in their 50s. It's not if; it's when. There's just a lot of friendship and support and love among the four of us."

McConnell adds: "We'd been through quite a bit together, and then got back together, and now everything is going well for us. I'd say everyone is feeling pretty good about where we're at right now and everything that's happened for us, and the way it's all falling together."

For years, Anastasio has worried about the state of live rock-and-roll in an age where smartphones have replaced lighters at shows, everyone has a "movie in their pocket" and a group's fir t performance can be captured and shared quicker than, say, a setlist by a 33-year-old band from Vermont can be uploaded and overanalyzed on the web. (He even even used the "Put down your phone" plea as the basis for a sermon during an "Icculus" narrative in 2009.) As he taps on his iPhone between the occasional ping from McConnell, Anastasio laments the lack of breakout rock bands at Coachella and Glastonbury—his harbingers of modern-festival cool—and reminisces about watching Alice in Chains, Nine Inch Nails and Soundgarden rise through the ranks.

While it's been several summers since DJs, pop stars and vanilla rock bands gained a house majority in the festival sphere, Anastasio's sentiments carry a particular weight coming from a member of Phish, a band whose biggest legacy may very well be restoring the summer campout as a righteous coming-of-age experience. He mouths the words to "Broken Hearts Are for Assholes" by Frank Zappa who—like Talking Heads and King Crimson—Anastasio saw early on in college, and notes the genius in the song's wordplay. The trick, Anastasio says, is repeating a phrase three times.

"Seeing music live is still my favorite experience—it's everything to me, that feeling of unity," Anastasio says, thinking back to the near-decade that Phish spent incubating and refining their craft in Vermont's clubs and bars, in a YouTube-less world. "It's tough for a young band these days. It's easy for someone to say: 'Why should I go out when I have the whole season of *Orange Is the New Black* and a pair of headphones?' And nobody is buying any records, so you're not making any money that way."

He's guilty of it, too, admitting that he thought about checking out Vulfpeck—a band that shares Phish's quirky energy and flair for theatrics at New York's Brooklyn Bowl a few days earlier, but ended up watching a recent video instead. Yet, he still has fond memories of waiting in line at a small club in Burlington to catch Pavement, "the only band [he] listened to in the '90s," and whose smart, slacker lyrics and loose, ragged cool resonated with him at a time when Phish started opening up their sound and heavily favoring "feel" and "groove." Anastasio is always searching out new music, and he vividly recalls getting chills at night while listening to Pavement on his skateboard. As a member of an improv band, he says, he could also relate to their outsider, cult status.

"I only had a couple of friends who liked Pavement, and we'd listen to them in the corner at parties," Anastasio reflect . "I tried hard to get Fish to listen to them, but it never really took. Now, I'm trying to get him to listen to Laura Mvula, who I'm obsessed

René Huemer

with. There should always be a couple of 22 year olds in bands out there that scare the shit out of everybody else."

* * *

WHEN PHISH ENTERED THEIR "3.0 period," they were branded as "older, wiser and geekier" by fans and the media, and they have succeeded in remaining healthy and committed to embracing their own catalog with renewed vigor. Gordon, in particular, has explored diffe ent health and wellness avenues; after years of practicing mindfulness, he switched to Transcendental Meditation and started working out daily with P90X extreme fitness VDs. He recently read Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing,* and managed to condense his expansive CD collection to a single row. (Interestingly, Gillian Welch was the only artist to have all of her albums survive the purge.)

"I used to talk about *The Artist's Way*, which is designed to get yourself back to your childlike sense of wonder," Gordon says. "I haven't been doing those exercises as much, but that book paints a good picture of what happens when the inner critic is lurking. You don't need to worry about exterior criticism because it happens inside. You might not even know it's there, but it's cutting you down. And then it's harder to bask in your success—a lot of writer's block comes from that stress and questioning. Not that I had been a basket case, but we never notice the knife blade when the internal critic is ready to cut. So much creativity comes from having fun, enjoying the process, which is what [recording in] Nashville was for us. I'm really interested in ways to remove that stress."

He continues to keep detailed journals of Phish's concerts, a practice he's maintained since the band's earliest days, and though he doesn't revisit the shows regularly, he's often surprised by how moments hit him in the rearview mirror. "Sometimes things don't sound as fresh when I hear them again—I don't know if it's the mix or the experience of listening back or my mood or something else," Gordon admits. "Sometimes things feel really unique and creative, like we're almost writing on the spot—new rhythms, patterns and textures—and then, I hear it back, and it feels like that's sort of 'jamband 101.' And then other times, I'm pleasantly surprised." He cites a long "No Man's Land" at Dick's as a recent gem. "I liked that Trey had this idea of just jamming right out of the gates," he says of the early evening exploration. "I loved the ambient jam that came out of the funk part."

Phish's setlist process has ebbed and fl wed over the years. These days, Anastasio will usually come up with ideas for a certain show—sometimes days before the gig, other times that afternoon—and a song list will be distributed to the band members around dinner time in case they need to brush up on any material. Of course, the band will figu e out the night's fl w onstage and often call an audible, with Anastasio discussing ideas with McConnell who, in turn, tells Fishman, who relays the message to Gordon. Occasionally, Gordon says with a laugh, Fishman will forget to tell him and just jump into a number.

"A lot of it is just being playful, but Trey is really good at diffe ent approaches at diffe ent times. Like he might say, 'I've been thinking: Let's do less covers and let's go back into the back catalog because it's fun.' He'll ask one of our managers or a friend if there's one song that everyone in the parking lot wishes they could hear or what people are talking about," Gordon says. "Like, one year, they're talking about 'Can we have the jams longer?' and another year they're asking if we can have it a little more like 1994. It all has to be taken with a grain of salt because, ultimately, we have to feel happy and have to feel that we're not just regurgitating the same jams and songs that we did in the past."

In fact, earlier this year, the band scheduled a few extra practice sessions, which allowed them to revisit the oft-overlooked corners of their songbook that they will text each other about. Anastasio says they spent time at Gordon's house relearning six or seven bust outs, including "Pigtail," which had been reassigned to TAB, the groovy "Round Room" and the bluegrass classic "Uncle Pen."

"But mostly," Anastasio is quick to point out, "we've been spending more time just talking. We'll travel to work on ideas, and it's really just a chance for the four of us to sit together. We're adults now, and everybody's got so much going on. Fish has fi e kids, Page has three and Mike is busy with his daughter and projects, so I don't get to see them that much. The experience of us sitting in front of a fi eplace and writing had a big effect on the way we've been playing. I've always loved band practice and, in a way, our recent writing sessions replaced band practice because I got to be with my favorite people."

> "Our albums are often known for their mix of styles but, this time, the cohesiveness comes to the forefront a bit more."
>
> **PAGE MCCONNELL**

Anastasio has started to think of Phish's repertoire as "a diary of my life from where I stand. I remember writing 'Harry Hood' in Greece," he says. "I remember writing 'You Enjoy Myself' when Fish and I were playing street music in Europe. We were sleeping in a car outside of Florence and playing all day in the streets. I was writing that song the whole time. We met this hilarious Italian guy who didn't really speak any English. One day, he came up and put one arm around me and one around Fish and he said, in broken English, 'You know, when I'm with you, you enjoy myself.' So that became the song's title. The rest of the music was written as we traveled across Europe that summer. That experience is still in there. Phish songs cover every era of my life from 19 until 52."

All four members of the band still have a deep desire to remain relevant, reach new fans and continue to grow as songwriters and musicians. The lines between their various projects have also blurred: Anastasio mentions that his Broadway community has impacted Phish's live show too, bringing recent onstage *Wingsuit* and "Meatstick" gags to life, and even helping the band rearrange David Bowie's "Space Oddity" as a barbershop-quartet tribute. He hints that they'll likely continue to work with Phish on their theatrical stunts going forward.

"We're all in the same band, having the same experiences—similar feelings and experiences," McConnell says. "We're really excited for people to hear something that has a little bit more substance and a little bit more depth."

Phish used to have a band rule that they had to play at least one gig in their 80s, and that goal has taken on new meaning as they enter their later years. "I remember going to see Modern Jazz Quartet," Anastasio says. "They were so good—telepathic. They started playing in like 1952 and this must have been around 1985. We were all standing there going, 'We're gonna be that.' Well, when you're standing here after 33 years, you start thinking, 'Wow, we kind of have been playing for a long time.'"

Yet, he still knows how to keep things in perspective. "My grandmother had a friend who was a geologist," Anastasio says with a smile. "At the dinner table, when people would get going on 'today's subject,' Trump or Brangelina or whatever, he'd just laugh and say, 'You're talking about years, and here I am, all day long, thinking in eons. I can't get worked up about this.'"

Reviews

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Jack White

JACK WHITE

Acoustic Recordings 1998-2016

THIRD MAN/COLUMBIA/XL

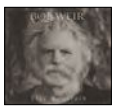
Jack White is a rock innovator, having accidentally spawned a ragged blues-rock revival with **The White Stripes**. He's also a crafty singer-songwriter and versatile multi-instrumentalist: equally at ease helming Loretta Lynn sessions and drumming for heavy-psych supergroup The Dead Weather. But for the past two decades, he's conjured unrivaled magic with an amplifier behind him, churning out white-hot electricity from a cheap Danelectro. A new double-disc acoustic collection warmly illuminates his underrated softer side—even if it's weird not hearing him crank out a guitar solo for 85 minutes straight. The 26-track set offers a chronological overview—from The White Stripes' second-ever 7-inch single, "Sugar Never Tasted So Good," through folky and rootsy cuts from **The Raconteurs** and his solo LPs, *Blunderbuss* and *Lazaretto*. Rough-hewn ditties from The White Stripes' first two albums, back when White avoided bass guitar like the plague, still fail to achieve liftoff—not even newly remixed versions of *De Stijl*'s "Apple Blossom" and "I'm Bound to Pack It Up," the latter highlighted by the most offbeat shaker in the history of recorded music. *White Blood Cells* shout-along "Hotel Yorba" still showcases his knack for a simply strummed chorus, backed by drummer **Meg White**'s caveman-punk pound. But "We're Going to Be Friends"—an innocent fingerpicked tale of puppy love—remains his unrivaled folk anthem. *Acoustic Recordings* offers the perfect chance to revisit the Stripes' misunderstood masterpiece, 2005's *Get Behind Me Satan*, on which White mostly ditched guitars to bang on pianos and marimbas. "Forever for Her (Is Over for Me)" and "White Moon" burrow down the gospel rabbit hole, chasing the most elliptical lyrics in his songbook. White diehards will enjoy the assorted alternate mixes, like the banjo-driven bluegrass version of The Raconteurs' "Top Yourself" and acoustic run at Coca-Cola campaign jingle "Love Is the Truth." But the album's most crucial moment digs deepest into the vault: The White Stripes' previously unheard 2005 leftover "City Lights" finds White channeling Led Zeppelin via "Going to California," seeking eternal solace over a droning Middle-Eastern guitar figure. It's a lost gift from a golden age—and one more reminder of his unplugged brilliance.

Ryan Reed

Bob Weir

Blue Mountain

COLUMBIA/LEGACY/ROAR



Since the summer of 2015, **Bob Weir** has been on an electrifying kick—energetic performances, reinvigorated jams and rich, throaty vocals—that began with his Fare Thee Well performances and continued through the formation of Dead & Company. But in all these musical adventures, Weir has been one patch in a colorful tapestry. With *Blue Mountain*, he steps out with all new, original solo material for the first time in decades. At 12 tracks, *Blue Mountain* is a gorgeously soulful album of acoustic folk, blues and country cuts. Weir tapped Yellowbirds alum **Josh Kaufman** to produce and co-write the set, with **Josh Ritter** stepping in for longtime lyricist John Perry Barlow and The National's **Scott Devendorf** and **Aaron** and **Bryce Dessner**—who were in the process of recording their own *Day of the Dead* tribute—fleshing out many of the studio sessions. Weir's steady collaborators **Steve Kimock**, **Robin Sylvester**, **Joe Russo** and newer friends like **Sam Cohen** also lend their talents, but all these names don't take the spotlight away from Weir. Nearing 70 years old, he creates songs that feel like home—warm and quietly exhilarating. On the title track—a sparse, country ballad—Weir sings, "My days, they were troubled and restless. All the bad news I looked for, I found." Lyrically, he's a wise elder reflecting on an adventurous youth in these tunes: "I know what the ghost towns know—love comes and goes," he sings on the gently grooving "Ghost Towns." That vantage point plays out beautifully on tracks like "Cottonwood Lullaby," a stunning meditation on passing time, anchored with gentle piano. Weir has climbed many mountains over the past 50 years—and this journey is a wonderful one to join. ***Justin Jacobs***

Wilco

Schmilco ANTI-/EPITAPH

Wilco's 10th album, *Schmilco*, is the photo negative of its predecessor, 2015's *Star Wars*. The overall blueprint is identical: the shits-and-giggles title (a not-so-subtle allusion to Harry Nilsson), the brief running time, the seemingly tossed-off vibe. But the colors are inverted: Where *Star Wars* found **Jeff Tweedy** and company dusting off their distortion pedals, *Schmilco* is defined by the solace of acoustic guitars and half-whispered hooks. The band makes its intentions clear with opener "Normal American Kids"—little more than a faint strum and hazy vocal, decorated by a first-take electric guitar that meanders in and out of tune. Tweedy excels when the stakes are low, relying on his eternally wise rasp and poetic nonsense. (The narrator on melancholy sing-along "We Aren't the World (Safety Girl)" is "blank as a cake and in love like a stupid lump of clay.") But with their low-key pace and sparse arrangements, tracks like the twangy, galloping "Cry All Day" and country-punk oddity "Someone to Lose" take longer than expected to burrow into your brain. Subtle sonic tics reveal themselves over time: **Glenn Kotche**'s hoedown tom-tom flourishes on "Quarters," the marimba and crawling-spider guitars on subversive head-fuck "Common Sense." *Schmilco* eases into a blissful groove in its final stretch. "Why am I in my skin again?/ I don't know how it works," Tweedy ponders over moaning bass and pitter-patter snares on tear-jerker "Just Say Goodbye." Rest assured: Wilco have never sounded more at ease in their own skin. ***Ryan Reed***

Regina Spektor

Remember Us to Life

WARNER BROS./SIRE

Since **Regina Spektor** released *What We Saw from the Cheap Seats* four years ago, *Orange Is the New Black* exploded with Spektor's "You've Got Time" pounding over the opening credits. In 2014, she gave birth to a son. She's the same Spektor on her solid seventh album, *Remember Us to Life*, but the world has changed—and she can't help but react. Spektor's work has always been notable for her mix of idiosyncratic lyrical detail and melody with gutting emotional depth, sometimes in the same song. She nails that balance on first single "Bleeding Heart," with a bouncy, hyperactive chorus and verses about empathy. ("You've won the war, so it's not your turn, but everything inside still burns.") On the cheerful "Older and Taller," she's wary that, "'Enjoy your youth' sounds like a threat. But I will anyway." Spektor's vocal and piano melodies are beautiful as always; her voice is stunning and warmly human. It's on "The Trapper and the Furrier" that we hear Spektor reach back to her raging, punky roots. The album centerpiece is a devastating story-song with foreboding strings and pounding piano parting for a fluttering chorus: "What a strange, strange world we live in, where the good are damned and the wicked forgiven." *Remember Us to Life* is less dynamic than prior records, but its hits seriously soar. ***Justin Jacobs***

Bon Iver

22, A Million JAGJAGUWAR

Some elusive holy spirit flows through **Justin Vernon**'s veins. And it carries him through mesmerizing spaces on *22, A Million*, his third LP as **Bon Iver**. Saxophones flutter in warped clusters; banjos dance around campfires of electronic hiss; vocoder choirs emerge from white noise. After the isolated acoustic catharsis of 2007's *For Emma, Forever Ago* and the art-rock grandiosity of 2011's *Bon Iver, Bon Iver* Vernon took his sweet time processing a new direction. But *22, A Million* is worth the five-year wait. Its 10 perplexingly titled tracks maintain the Bon Iver trademarks—the meditative croon, the abstract lyrics, the shapeshifting arrangements—but find clever ways of recontextualizing them. The percussion-free "22 (OVER S∞∞N)" is carried by Vernon's swooping falsetto, but a collection of pitch-shifted soul samples inch the track closer than usual toward capital-G Gospel. "10 d E A T h b R E a s T" veers toward electronica, layering wacky vocal loops over speaker-rattling bass blasts and distorted drums that sound like bowling balls ricocheting off car hoods. There are gentle nods to the past: "715 - CR☒☒KS" commences with a gooey a cappella intro reminiscent of Kanye West favorite "Woods," and the thunderous "666" recalls the drum-heavy dynamic shifts of "Minnesota, WI." For all its fresh tricks—the jarring samples, the woodwind emphasis—the album's emotional centerpiece is its simplest moment: "00000 Million" finds Vernon belting over creaky, gospel-hued piano chords. "Days have no numbers," a voice sings—a burst of sunshine. And life feels limitless, indeed. ***Ryan Reed***

The Dean Ween Group

The Deaner Album ATO

It's finally here: the solo debut by **Mickey Melchiondo, Jr.**, half of the legendary genre-jumping rock weirdoes, Ween. And while Aaron Freeman, Melchiondo's partner in brown, shed his *nom de Ween* for his own extra-band efforts, Melchiondo embraces his, calling the record *The Deaner Album* and digging deeper than ever into the eclectic and occasionally juvenile tendencies that make Ween who they are. With an all-star cast of Ween world musicians, the music hops from devastating Prince-loving double-guitar put-down jams ("Mercedes Benz") to overt stylistic tributes (the blue skies of the album-opening "Dickie Betts"). Instead of using the solo debut as a platform for late career "maturity," as would seem to be dictated by the Laws of Rock, Melchiondo offers a tour of many of Ween's alleged pop transgressions of the past 30 years, like the gleeful sludged-out nihilism of "I'll Take It (And Break It)" or the quasi-country-stomp hate-spew of "Exercise Man." Unlike his Ween partner Freeman, though, Melchiondo doesn't veer toward the vulnerable too often, approaching it on the classic-feeling "You Were There" and the moist stereo-panned loser's lament "Charlie Brown," but more

Wilco

Phish

Big Boat JEMP

Phish fans will never truly love their records as much as they love the immersive experience of their live shows. So then, it's only sensible for the group to approach its albums as entirely different experiences, without losing its identity as a band. Complicating matters: That very identity has evolved since their days writing the concert staples that they loaded onto their 1989 debut, *Junta*. But Phish aren't kids anymore, a fact they've been struggling with ever since their return. Before they could successfully be honest as studio artists again, they needed to use their "3.0 creative sparks" to light that initial fire they had as a band when they first formed. They needed to grow new skin over old bones, and be comfortable doing it.

Which is exactly where *Big Boat* succeeds: It's the album that Phish has tried to make since 2009's *Joy* or even since 1996's refined *Billy Breathes*. It opens with "Friends," using **Jon Fishman**'s cryptic lyrics to set the scene for what's to follow. If 1993's *Rift* was a concept album about marriage, then *Big Boat* is an album about the things that become more relevant two decades after the wedding ceremony—family, home, religion, death. The inescapable eventuality of death and unanswerable questions of spirituality and faith are laced throughout, peeking their way through Phish's homespun, oddball storytelling.

Big Boat's biggest surprise might just be **Page McConnell**'s "Home," if only because, though unveiled here for the first time, it already sounds like a live classic. Another highlight—"Petrichor," the 13-minute **Trey Anastasio** meditation that closes out the album—succeeds where "Time Turns Elastic" did not in a four-piece arrangement. It creates a bandwidth of cinematic music and imagination on a scale usually reserved for symphony halls, filling the heart as well as the ears with sound, melody and emotion.

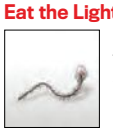
Mike Gordon's "Waking Up Dead" lends itself well to the band's new mature quirkiness, while Anastasio's "More" is cut from the same dad-rock cloth as his recent solo efforts. It's Phish 3.0 songwriting, to be sure, but with Phish's unmistakable gallop racing it around the turntable. It's 100-percent Phish—just mature Phish. They're past the point of striving for that one breakthrough hit and, instead, they're going for that one breakthrough album. With *Big Boat*, they may have delivered it. ***Benjy Eisen***

often finding it with a guitar, like on the the mournful mid-tempo instrumental "Garry." Give or take its lack of Ween's emotional gravitas, *The Deaner Album* is everything a good ol' Ween fan could hope for, popping with anthemic swear-filled scuzz-rockers, long stretches of brilliant, unflashy guitar playing and consistently surprising songwriting turns.

Jesse Jarnow

Lotus

Eat the Light LOTUS VIBES



Lotus emerged in 1999, touting a versatile style dubbed "jamtronica." But nearly two decades and 12 albums later, the genre-blurring quintet just want to get funky and burn down the house. The polished, propulsive *Eat the Light* is the band's first to feature vocal hooks on every track–a move that inches them ever closer to national attention outside the jam circuit. Lotus have been upfront with their intentions, designing this as a full-fledged "pop record"–a groove-heavy soundtrack to backyard barbecues and windows-down car cruising. While longtime fans may crave more of the instrumental firepower that defines the band's live show, *Eat the Light* maintains Lotus' high standard of musicianship in this mainstream framework. The album does limp out of the gate with a pair of troubling tunes: "Fearless" rides a deep-burning, Jamiroquai-styled disco-funk groove built on canned strings, fat synth-bass and four-on-the-floor drums, but **Mutlu Onaral**'s belted vocals push the vibe into full-blown campiness. Meanwhile, "I've Been a Fool (Toy Guns)" fails to build on its compelling vocal hook, grinding out a tedious, one-note bass riff. After that false start, *Eat the Light* finds its funky footing with the title track, a riotous homage to Talking Heads' "Moon Rocks." **Gabe Otto**, who handled the David Byrne role during Lotus' "Deconstructed" live shows, yelps in vintage *Speaking in Tongues* style over an assault of synth, organ and washed-out marimba–then, for variety's sake, a half-time coda of space-rock guitar. Despite its blatant nods to the past (including another Talking Heads-styled funk master-class, the clavinet-driven party-starter "Sleep When We Are Dead"), *Eat the Light* feels mostly contemporary, full of stylish tunes that slot in nicely on a road trip playlist alongside acclaimed dance-pop/rock acts like LCD Soundsystem, Passion Pit and JR JR. After nine uptempo fist-pumpers, "Sodium Vapor" closes the album with a blast of simple, strummed alt-rock. "Turn on the bright lights, let everyone see," chirps singer-songwriter **Andy Bianculli**, before a climactic surge of psychedelic guitar. That lyric feels pertinent. With *Eat the Light*, Lotus have made a convincing–and noble–bid for a broader spotlight.

Justin Jacobs

Greensky Bluegrass

Shouted, Written Down & Quoted

BIG BLUE ZOO

Humming like an expertly crafted and high-powered machine, **Greensky Bluegrass** stride confidently forward into the big shoes they've filled within the jamgrass universe with their latest LP. Showing a swagger and confidence that comes after a few years of sustained success in the limelight, their latest studio effort, *Shouted, Written Down & Quoted* represents their first album recorded *and* released after the band's grassroots rise from the bar/club scene to theaters and high billings on the festival circuit. Recontextualized with a more rock-and-ramble hybrid sound, **Paul Hoff an**'s "Past My Prime" is an older tune electrified–replete with a plugged-in power rarely heard in earlier Greensky recordings. The more pastoral and reflective sound of 2014's evocative *If Sorrows Swim* returns on "While Waiting," a song about the process of aging, wisdom gained from experience and the vulnerability of feeling lost on the road. "Run or Die" is a chooglin' cowboy burner and one showing great promise for further development as an extended live staple. The more explorative and exquisitely layered sounds come on the B side: "Room Without a Roof" and the extensive "Living Over" (perhaps the best chance to hear Dobro genius **Anders Beck** truly soar with his trademark sound) may just be two of the band's most intricate and complex compositions to date. The labyrinthine "Living Over" harkens back to the high lonesome (and masterful) sounds of Jerry Douglas Band at their best, further proof that these Michigan-based pickers are deserving of their position as the likely heirs apparent to the lofty Telluride Bluegrass Festival throne one day. ***Wesley Hodges***

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

You say goodbye.

Folk never got much freakier than husband-and-wife duo **Judy Henske** and **Jerry Yester**'s newly reissued 1969 one-shot *Farewell Aldebaran* (Omnivore). Released originally on Frank Zappa's (not so) Straight label, *Aldebaran* famously sounds like glorious singer-lyricist Henske fronting 10 quite distinct bands, from the greasy garage rock of "Snowblind" to the innovative early synthesizer experiments of the title track's stellar apocalypse. A lysergic lullaby, off-kilter English balladry and slightly askew Appalachian epic help fill out this amazing reflection of one of music's most rewarding eras in Los Angeles studio experimentation, with former The Lovin' Spoonful members Yester and **Zal Yanovsky** apparently having a ball on the production end of things.

Hey hey!

There are tribute albums and then there's **The Minus 5**'s *Of Monkees and Men* (Yep Roc). With the help of a former R.E.M. member or two, **Scott McCaughey** pays homage to the so-called "Pre-Fab Four" in a vinyl side's worth of tunes. It begins with a 9-minute paean to "Michael Nesmith" and concludes with "Boyce & Hart" ("hitmakers from the start"), perhaps the first song focusing on actual working songwriters. "Davey Gets the Girl," "Song for Peter Tork" and "Mickey's a Cool Drummer" tell the rest of the story in pop as timelessly melodic as its subjects.

Bop-40.

Back in Grandpa's day, jazz groups regularly looked to the pop charts for material. And that was **The Bad Plus**' conceit when the practically perfect trio consisting of **Ethan Iverson** (piano), **Dave King** (drums) and **Reid Anderson** (bass) began recording together in 2001. After four albums of original music, the Plus returns to Plan A with *It's Hard* (Sony), an album of sensationally reimagined material like Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time," Kraftwerk's "The Robots" and Peter Gabriel's "Games Without Frontiers." Rather than merely soloing over changes, the trio refracts the originals through their own colorful, sonic kaleidoscope.

Snow job.

One of the late **Gail Zappa**'s final productions, *The Crux of the Biscuit* (Zappa) purports to shed light on the creation of **Frank Zappa**'s classic 1974 one-size-fits-all release *Apostrophe (')*, which became FZ's highest-charting album, thanks to "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow." And sure enough, the reason it deserves your attention is an extremely wild 19-minute live version of that very tune (along with "St. Alphonzo's Pancake Breakfast") performed by Zappa's peerless 1973 band, featuring percussionist **Ruth Underwood**, keyboardist **George Duke**, violinist **Jean-Luc Ponty** and some highly evolved studio heavies. The alternate mixes and outtakes that pad out the album are fun enough but hardly crucial.

Funk mit feeling.

Since this is beginning to resemble the reissues section, let's celebrate *Grasshopper* (Inflated), the brand new second album by Brooklyn psych-pop quartet **Zula**. Drummer **Pablo Eluchans** is the MVP among these inventive indie-minimalists, who whip up plenty of funky whirligigging and studio jiggery-pokery behind disaffected, medium-mopey lyrics about digging up "more dirt to cover our doubt." Cousins **Henry** and **Nate Terepka**'s outfit sometimes sounds like an emo band yearning to breathe free, which it does gloriously in "Basketball," a fairly epic dub-rock throwdown that bounces all over the room.

Mike Dillon

Functioning Broke

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

If percussionist **Mike Dillon** hasn't already highlighted his wide palette through his varied work with Ani DiFranco, Les Claypool, Critters Buggin and Galactic, then *Functioning Broke*'s mix of cover tunes will certainly do the trick. Throughout the tolling and sometimes atmospheric-vibes-centric record, Dillon offers tunes by Elliott Smith, Neil Young and Martin Denny, as well as several originals–showing off his skill on marimba, xylophone, timpani, orchestral bells, tubular bells, tabla and congas, stacking up the instruments in places without cluttering up the mix. Hearing the Elliott Smith songs stripped of the heartbreaking sound of Smith's voice allows the simple appeal of the chords, melodies and phrasings to stand out. "Independence Day" sounds like it was made for the ringing tick-tock tones of mallet percussion. The tone and texture on these songs can range from Steve Reich-ish classical/minimalism to retro-futuristic bachelor-pad exotica to an almost ambient sleepiness. Elsewhere, Dillon conjures the raw feel of Congolese amplified thumb-piano innovators Konono No. 1 or of marching-band-meets-gamelan. Given the relative timbral limitations of the instrumentation, Dillon creates an impressive range of moods.

John Adamian

Conor Oberst

Ruminations NONESUCH

It's been two years since **Conor Oberst**'s last solo effort, *Upside Down Mountain*, and it's evident that the musician has been through some things since. His new album, *Ruminations*, which was recorded in a mere 48-hour span, is an acoustic-folk effort that features only Oberst's voice, a guitar, a piano and a harmonica. It's notably intimate, as if he's singing directly to you in his living room, and there is a sense that he has something to get out in the songs. "Counting Sheep" is particularly sparse and impactful, released mostly through the poetry of the singer's lyrics. "A Little Uncanny" amps up the instrumentation slightly, bolstered by Dylan-esque harmonica, and allows Oberst to balance his mournful lines with a propulsive melody. The musician's strength has always been in his narrative-based lyrics, which often recount characters and places with deep clarity, and these tracks, which he has referred to as "sketches," offer the perfect platform for that sort of storytelling. "Next of Kin" is the best example of this rhythmical lyricism, building to a beautiful, evocative song that lingers after Oberst becomes silent. It's unclear exactly what he's been through and what feelings he's trying to sort through, but the album's content does perfectly reflect its title. It will leave you wondering and considering things, whatever they are, too. ***Emily Zemler***

The Head and the Heart

Signs of Light WARNER BROS.

The Head and the Heart's third album, *Signs of Light*, finds this indie-folk collective one member down. Following the tour for 2013's *Let's Be Still* and recording the first tracks for *Signs of Light*, guitarist and singer-songwriter **Josiah Johnson** told his band members that he needed to take a leave of absence. It seemed inexplicable, mainly because this was the outfit that seemed "meant to be," defying odds, logic and geographic impossibility–all musical transplants who showed up at the same Ballard, Wash., pub on an open mic night in the summer of 2009 and realized they should form a band. Even the bartender, **Chris Zasche**, who had never played bass before, saw the musical inevitability and asked to join as the bassist. With Johnson gone, does that make them *headless*? Perhaps. But heartless? Never. In fact, the 13 songs on this album tremble with vulnerability, emotion, discovery and the kind of hard-won wisdom that they only hinted at in their first two albums. Where their last offering was dark with apprehension, *Signs of Light* throws open the shutters and reveals a new dawn for this group of dreamers, misfits and musical

resettlers who all had to step up their game to fill in the psychic and musical void that Johnson left behind. And, in doing so, they outdid their earlier high-water marks, from **Charity Rose Thielen**'s "Library Magic," a (very) thinly veiled recap of what the last year was for The Head and the Heart, as things were unraveling, to **Jonathan Russell**'s anthemic "All We Ever Knew," which out-Mumfords the Mumfords. *Jaan Uhelszki*

Cass McCombs

Mangy Love ANTI-

Like fellow sonic journeyman and kindred spirit Beck Hansen, **Cass McCombs** often gets his kicks via left-field fake outs and U-turns. A given LP might start with a lo-fi noise-rock attack, then slither into jazz crooning or breezy folk. His canvas is as broad as his record collection—for him, the element of surprise is as crucial as a chord change. With 2011's bummed-out *Wit's End*, he stripped back his arrangements and captured one mood across a full track list, but his early genre-hopping zeal was sorely missed. On *Mangy Love*, he massages a sweet spot between chaos and consistency, with hooks and grooves as compelling as the stylistic shifts. McCombs still observes the world with warped wit blurred with profound sadness: "The highest authority on Cheez Whiz/ Hiding behind a Supreme Court urinal," he sings over an addictive Afro-funk gallop on "Run Sister Run." On "Bum Bum Bum," he contrasts bleak imagery ("No, it ain't no dream, it's all too real / How long until this river of blood congeals?") with hypnotic soft-rock guitar arpeggios. This weird tandem of catharsis and silliness—all captured with hi-fi studio resonance by producers **Rob Schnapf** and **Dan Horne**—finds McCombs in his purest state. (Fellow surrealist musician **Mike Gordon** lends his talents to the album as well.) "Sugar and spice and everything weird," he sings. Spot-on. *Ryan Reed*

St. Paul & The Broken Bones

Sea of Noise RECORDS LLC

St. Paul & The Broken Bones mine the very fiber of soul music, a seminal American sound. It's music suited for celebration and exhortation, the sound of pure pop wholly detached from today's over the top theatrics and political pontificating. While *Sea of Noise*—the follow-up to their widely hailed debut, 2014's *Half the City*—never shies away from offering commentary on society's failings, it doesn't revel in them either. Rather, it finds singer and frontman **Paul Janeway** exhorting his listeners to find a higher purpose, using effusive, ecstatic revelry to rouse the faithful while encouraging them to get caught up in a kind of aural delirium. That's apparent on giddier numbers like "Midnight on the Earth" and "Brain Matter," but especially so on riveting ballads like "I'll Be Your Woman" (in which Janeway effectively switches gender perspective without hesitation), "Flow With It (You Got Me Feeling Like)" and "Tears in the Diamond," songs that find him testifying with the tenacity of the most fervent Bible beater. Little wonder then that he often brings to mind another great torch singer turned preacher, Al Green. Ultimately, *Sea of Noise* is a powerful testament to the unflagging power of music borne from faith and conviction. That makes for a festive noise, indeed. *Lee Zimmerman*

WOLF!

1-800-WOLF! ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Throughout *1-800-WOLF*, the sophomore album by the New York instrumental trio **WOLF!**, the band maintains a certain level of funkiness without ever emitting a single song that might actually be classified as *funk*. Lately of Joe Russo's Almost Dead, bandleader and guitarist **Scott Metzger** was also a chief songwriter in the beloved, dormant (and likewise-capitalized) New York quartet RANA, and his old band's Ween-loving eclecticism comes through on the disc's 13 compact tunes, drawn together by a unified laid-back slyness. A handful of the group's songs, including "Whiskey Mister" and the opening "Pork 'n Slaw" recall classic mid-century R&B greasers, but it's the wide range of other material that best highlights the considerable emotional range of Metzger's guitar playing, from the low-key Spanish bolero of "You Are No Longer My Friend, My Friend" to the noir shuffle of "Tomatillo Verde." Most intriguing are a trio of quiet late-album pieces, including the bayou sunset of "Bohemian Grove," the pre-war pop of "Oaxaca Ox" and the exquisite still-of-the-night vibe of "Denim Love Affair." It's not the funk that matters, anyway, but the cool. *Jesse Jarnow*

Carl Broemel

4th of July

STOCKS IN ASIA/THIRTY TIGERS

"So many people are awake in the city/ I see 'em walking up and down the road," **Carl Broemel** croons, strumming a creaky acoustic guitar. "You'd think, eventually, they would be sleepy and try to find a quiet place to go." That could easily be the tagline for *4th of July*, the My Morning Jacket guitarist's third solo LP. Much like 2010's *All Birds Say*, this one's full of serene folk-rock: twangy pedal steel, brushed drums, daydreamy lyrics like "Hello, moon/ I wanna kiss you," and hazy vocal harmonies that waft by like puffs of beachside weed smoke. It's like the softest, tenderest stretches of any My Morning Jacket LP infused with a boost of Seals & Crofts. The Nashville-recorded album features a crew of high-profile guests—**Neko Case**, **Russ Pollard**, MMJ bandmates **Tom Blankenship** and **Bo**

1 Phish

"Breath and Burning"
From the album *Big Boat*
Jemp Records

Phish has announced the release of its new studio album, *Big Boat*. Released via the band's own JEMP Records, *Big Boat* arrives on Friday, October 7. The album was produced by Bob Ezrin (Pink Floyd, Alice Cooper, KISS), his second collaboration with Phish, following 2014's Fuego. Recorded in Nashville, New York and the band's home state of Vermont, Big Boat features 13 new songs contributed by all four members of the band—Trey Anastasio, Jon Fishman, Mike Gordon and Page McConnell. The album was recently named among Rolling Stone's "Fall Preview 2016: 35 Must-Hear Albums," with Anastasio noting, "There's definitely a point of view to this one. We're old enough to have a healthy respect for mortality."

www.phish.com

2 Hamish Anderson

"Hold on Me"
From the album *Trouble*
Self-Released

Hamish is an Australian blues rock musician who's single "Burn" received Best Blues Song by the Independent Music Awards. He was profiled in *Huffington Post* "Beyond the Six Strings" and *The Blues Magazine* UK for their "Future of Blues Music" issue. His debut album, *Trouble*, releasing this October, was produced by Jim Scott (Tom Petty, Wilco), and features an all-star band. The title track appears on Spotify's "Blues & Roots Rock" playlist. The second single, "Hold On Me" released September 16.

www.hamishandersonmusic.com

3 Twiddle

"Daydream Farmer"
Live from the Levitate Festival, 7/9/16
Self-released

In July Twiddle joined Tedeschi Trucks Band, among other great artists, at the Levitate Festival in Marshfield, MA. While the set list included favorites like "Lost in the Cold" and "When it Rains it Poors", the poetic sing along "Daydream Farmer" stood out. Hailing from 2011's *Somewhere on the Mountain* release, this live version boasts a beautiful piano solo, sage lyrics, and a closing guitar spot which cries in unison with the chorus -

'Live to love and let go while we're still around.

Keep our earth in your soul and your sole to the ground'

www.twiddlemusic.com

4 Madaila

"Secret"
From the album *Traces*
Future Fields

MADAILA - /mə deɪ lə/, [muh DEY luh] - proper noun - a psych pop band from Burlington, VT. Madaila is upbeat, synth¬-heavy, and catchy. Contagious melody and freakier elements coexist in the tradition of Prince and The Talking Heads. Live, the 5-¬piece explores the deeper possibilities lying within their concisely-recorded material. The band's improvisational power pushes their material to its edges and to uplifting peaks.

www.musicofmadaila.com

5 Charlie Wheeler Band

"People Keep On Talkin'"
From the album *Blues Karma and the Ktichen Sink*
Self-released

The hard driving Charlie Wheeler Band are back, kicking down doors with their 4th full length album, *BLUES KARMA AND THE KITCHEN SINK*. The single "People Keep On Talkin'" reached #7 on the national blues rock radio charts. If Southern Rock and Grunge had a baby, it'd be the CWB!

www.charliewheelerband.com

6 Moonalice

"High 5"
From the album *High 5*
A Minor Label

"High 5" is the title cut from Moonalice's new album. Guitarist Barry Sless composed the song, which drummer John Molo likens to a tribute to the jazz classic, "Take 5." Moonalice, a psychedelic, roots rock band known for improvisational jams, comprises Sless, Molo, guitarist-vocalist Roger McNamee, and keyboardist-bassist-vocalist Pete Sears. The band's single, "It's 4:20 Somewhere," has been downloaded over 4.6 million times.

www.thegarciaproject.com

7 Leland Sundries

"Radiator Sabotage"
From the album *Music for Outcasts*
L'Echiquier Records/Decor/Weiner

"Heaps of wit and melody… Beautiful rambling storytelling that flirts with pop and sounds a little like Silver Jews." -*UNCUT*

"Scrappy yet ingenuous rock poetry."
- *MOJO*

"Genius… A-"
- Robert Christgau, *NOISEY*

www.lelandsundries.com

8 Great Shapes

"Brightness"
From the album *Brightness*
Self-Released

Great Shapes, formed in 2013, is a renegade pop band from El Paso, Texas. Their upbeat sound, influenced stylistically by post punk and indie pop, is sure to get you up and moving. Look out for their tour dates and new album coming in Spring 2017.

www.facebook.com/greatshapesmusic

9 Kim Tibbs

"Move!"
From the album *...Kim Tibbs*
Black Orchid Records

...A Dreamer... A Humble Soul... A Keyboardist... A Lover... A Mom... A Musician... An Organist... A Singer... A Songwriter... A Traveler... All of these words give a total description of Kim Tibbs. From playing or singing, it is clear that she is on a mission to let her sound be heard everywhere in the world! Go to kimtibbsmusic.com to witness a new wave of sound being birthed!

www.kimtibbsmusic.com

10 Youngest of Elders

"Shame Spiral"
From the album *Nothing is Wonderful*
Self-released

Youngest of Elders focuses on dealing with and understanding the angst, fears, anxiety and nostalgia of past, present and future; while constantly pushing toward a sound that's reminiscent of Hum, Cursive, Pedro the Lion, Sunny Day Real Estate and many others in that fashion.

www.youngestofelders.bandcamp.com

11 Eminence Ensemble

"Mouse Hunt"
From the album *Mouse Hunt*
True Music, LLC

Eminence Ensemble is a progressive rock/fusion quintet, based out of Boulder, Colo. Now in their sixth year together, Eminence Ensemble is cranking it up a notch with a plethora of national tour dates, new music and a tighter sound than ever. The band has influences ranging from Rush to Steely Dan to Michael Jackson. Audiences have come to love Eminence Ensemble's explosive live performances and captivating unique style of songwriting.

www.eminenceensemble.com

12 Editor's Pick: David Crosby

"The City"
From the live album *Lighthouse*
GroundUP Music/Verve label Group

Lighthouse features a rare economy of sound, filled primarily by Crosby's voice and guitars, and League's skillful production. There's a sparse, unvarnished quality to the tracks that allows the songs breathing room and for the full emotional weight of the lyrics to emerge, unencumbered by extraneous instrumentation. "Michael said the record I would love to make is to play to your strengths, to do these strange tunings and vocal stacks you do. That was the record he envisioned from the get go," Crosby says, with League referencing Crosby's seminal solo album, 1971's *If I Could Only Remember My Name*. "I think he and [engineer] Fab Dupont got probably the best sound on my voice I've ever heard."

www.davidcrosby.com

13 JamOFF! Winner: Lola Rhodes

"I Wanna Be"
From the album *Lola Rhodes*
Self-Released

Lola Rhodes is a Los Angeles based singer-songwriter. She wears her independent artist title proudly as she utilizes platforms like Periscope to expand her digital fan base and has been slowly releasing her debut album exclusively on Bandcamp this year. Her music is currently signed with Castle Peak Music licensing and she's looking forward to what's next.

www.lolarhodes.com

Jay Blakesberg

Koster—but the vibe is so laid-back that few individual voices or riffs stand out. Same goes for the songs: Broemel has a knack for crafting breezy, Wurlitzer-filled waltzes ("Rockingchair Dancer") and reflective, mid-tempo ballads ("Landing Gear"), but *4th of July* rarely engages at a level beyond soothing background music. One major exception is the title track, a slow-burning, psych-rock behemoth that stretches out to 10 minutes, navigating spacey electronics and dissonant feedback. Broemel excels in these dark edges and strange detours, balancing the sweet and sour. ***Ryan Reed***

Yarn

This Is the Year SELF-RELEASED

Yarn's sixth album is all about reinvention. Not only did the band relocate from New York to North Carolina, but it also went through a slew of trials and tribulations along the way. Naturally, the Americana quartet channeled all of it into a front-porch folk album, filled with love and heartbreak, pain and salvation—glasses half empty and then half full. The strongest song is the first, "Carolina Heart," which speaks to the group's recent upheaval: "I need some new blood in my veins, to guide me through the pain." Others, such as "Love/Hate," spell out hurt to come and learned from. Throughout, frontman **Blake Christiana**'s vocals are as worthy as his heroes'—Waylon, Willie and Merle—a troubadour's drawl set to the heart's tempo. There are some playful tracks, like "Long Way to Texas," the tale of a Yankee act driven by twang, and "Sweet Dolly," an ode to rhinestone suits and the queen of country. Overall, though, there's wisdom in these lyrics—reminders that life is weird and cruel, that one must look to the future and that change propels change—telling of an album that was first lived and then recorded. ***Kiran Herbert***

Brett Dennen

Por Favor ELEKTRA

Despite ever-growing recognition and accumulating various accolades along the way, **Brett Dennen** maintains a humble presence that finds him firmly grounded in an easy lilt. Not surprisingly, he's never made any secret of his early fascination with Paul Simon and, even now, 13 years after his self-produced eponymous independent debut, Simon remains an obvious influence that leaves an indelible impression. To be sure, Dennen summons the spirit of the especially cheery Simon circa *There Goes Rhymin' Simon*, a point that's driven homeward bound by the reggae shuffle of songs like "Cassidy" and "Tengboche" and the carefree sha-la-la refrain of the otherwise insistent "Stand Up for It." But it's also apparent in the effortless delivery Dennen gives "Bonfire" and the wistful vocal that he applies so tenderly to songs such as "Strawberry Road" and "Another Life." Granted, at 6-feet-5-inches tall, with his flaming red hair, he is already assured to make a striking impression, but as *Por Favor* and his previous five albums have proven, it's his consistently melodic music that's worthy of notice. Even the hushed stroll of a number like "Where We Left Off," a song so easy and engaging that it qualifies as ear candy, Dennen secures instant attention. There's no heavy lifting, no weighty world issues, simply the shimmer and sweetness of sublime meditations on romance, reconciliation and the joys of a gentle caress. Even if Brennen insists it's "de nada," it's still worth a "por favor" to receive such rich rewards. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Brendan Canning

Home Wrecking Years ARTS & CRAFTS

Broken Social Scene co-founder **Brendan Canning** lulled fans to sleep with the acoustic daydreams of his last solo LP, 2013's *You Gots 2 Chill*. But he re-emerges from that slumber with his third album *Home Wrecking Years*: 10 quintessential servings of the widescreen, Toronto-tinted indie-rock that only Camp Social Scene can muster. Backed by a versatile six-piece band (including Socialites **Sam Goldberg Jr.** and Bonham-of-his-time **Justin Peroff**), Canning showcases all of his trademark sonic touches: the mumbling, fizzy rock of "Vibration Walls" and "Book It to Fresno," the jazzy space-rock of "Once I Was a Runner," the oceanic piano balladry of "Sleeping Birds Like Lasers." The centerpiece is "Keystone Dealers," a sizzling bossa-nova groove outfitted with hypnotic violin and trumpet. Canning assembled the album in low-pressure bursts across 2013 to 2015, attempting to capture ideas with spontaneity and energy. A communal jubilation permeates every second of the LP. Almost two decades after Broken Social Scene first reinvigorated indie rock, *Home Wrecking Years* feels like an effortless grand slam—one of the genre's OGs dusting off his bat just for the joy of it. ***Ryan Reed***

Brett Dennen

Balkan Beat Box

Shout It Out DIGITAL MONKEY, INC.

Tel Aviv's **Balkan Beat Box** create party music that's devilishly tough to pin down. Beginning with their self-titled 2005 debut, the band has stuffed slinky saxophone lines, propulsive Middle Eastern percussion, electronic pings and swirls, heavy-thumping bass and the irreplaceably electric vocals of **Tomer Yosef** into a style that is unmistakably theirs. While 2012's *Give* took on a slightly subdued tone, *Shout It Out* is Balkan Beat Box as wild as ever. Along with Yosef's rhythmic chanting, it's **Ori Kaplan**'s saxophone that determines which Balkan Beat Box songs truly connect (his sandpapery sax was sampled on Jason Derulo's massive 2013 hit "Talk Dirty"), and the horn is all over *Shout It Out*. First single "I Trusted U" is intensely catchy but restrained. The song's got handclaps and a lumbering drumbeat—by no means a flop—but it's when the band goes fast and furious that they take off. "Kum Kum" features Israeli vocal trio **A-WA** singing in Arabic and trading lightning-fast lines with Yosef, setting the song to boil. On "Chin Chin" and "I'll Watch Myself" the band fold hip-hop into the mix of fluttering sax and crunchy percussion. *Shout It Out* is spicy and exotic—but even a radio-pop audience could get behind it. And hopefully they will. ***Justin Jacobs***

Devendra Banhart

Ape in Pink Marble NONESUCH

Returning from an unusually quiet few years, onetime freak-folker **Devendra Banhart** settles into his mid-career vibes on *Ape in Pink Marble*. While the ramshackle and spontaneous-feeling qualities of Banhart's prolific early-21st-century run are a bit smoothed over, neither the freakiness nor the folkiness have escaped him, and the now-35-year-old musician seems to tap effortlessly into a mellifluous songwriting space that lightly channels the Brazilian *Tropicalismo* but mostly follows the warbling upper-register nuances of Banhart's singular voice. Quirky grooves like "Fancy Man" and disco-folkers like "Fig in Leather" threaten to tip the balance toward novelty eclecticism, but Banhart's charm wins the day, carrying string sections ("Theme for a Taiwanese Woman in Lime Green"), kosmopolitan, Kinks-y laments ("Souvenirs") and deliverances that border on slow jams ("Saturday Night"). Throughout, Banhart manages the trick of keeping the proceedings both mellow and magical, but also in constant motion, even if that motion is a deceleration to the near-total stillness and dim lighting of late-album tracks like "Linda." And while the one-word refrain of the disc-closing "Celebration" might not quite make it as wisdom, it speaks plenty for musical maturity—a graceful landing in the space-age bohemian bachelor/bachelorette pad of all our weirdest dreams. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Nels Cline

Lovers BLUE NOTE

On paper, **Nels Cline**'s *Lovers* sounds impossibly idyllic. The Wilco guitarist's latest solo foray is a double LP, his first release for Blue Note, devoted exclusively to "mood music," inspired by Bill Evans, Gil Evans and Henry Mancini and centered around the exploration of the relationship between, as Cline puts it, "sound/song, romance/intimacy." But Cline excels at defying expectations, as he's done since his early days in the avant-garde Los Angeles jazz underground, and *Lovers* is no exception. Backed by a 23-member ensemble, Cline explores conventional mood music sounds, skipping through material like "Glad to Be Unhappy" (popularized by Frank Sinatra) and "Secret Love," which was sung memorably by Doris Day, his playing incisive and restrained. He sounds at home evoking the bygone sounds of exotica, and he's still too adventurous not to get weird on these well-loved songs. He offers up a quixotic take on Gábor Szabó's "Lady Gabor," a bit of anguish on Annette Peacock's "So Hard It Hurts/Touching" and even a cover of Sonic Youth's "Snare, Girl"—a hat tip to Cline's noisy roots—but he never veers away from the subtlety that permeates this set of songs. As wonderful as the covers here are, Cline's own compositions put forth the most thrilling moments, like the slowcore-shaded album closer, "The Bond," which points to the vastness of the album's theme—at once tender, spooky, lovely, puzzling and ultimately overpowering. ***Jason Woodbury***

O'Connor Band

Coming Home ROUNDER

Mark O'Connor has been one of the most celebrated and prolific violinists within the American roots-music world for so long now that it's easy to take his presence for granted. Best known as one of the key movers and shakers in bluegrass—one of the acknowledged masters who's consistently pushed that genre forward while paying his respects to its past—he's also performed with symphony orchestras, in mainstream country and folk scenarios and is a respected teacher. But listening to him play with the **O'Connor Band**—his wife and fellow fiddler **Maggie**, son **Forrest** (mandolin) and Forrest's fiancée, **Kate Lee** (another fiddler), with guitarist **Joe Smart** and bassist **Geoff Saunders**—it's evident that this is where he wants to be most right now. *Coming Home* is joyous music, the sound of people who feel comfortable and elated to be picking and singing together, with nothing to prove but that shared love. There are both originals and classics here, from the sweet and chipper opening number, "Always Do," to ballads like "Old Black Creek," showcasing the group's vocal harmonies, and fiery instrumentals such as "Fishers Hornpipe" and Bill Monroe's "Jerusalem Ridge," each a reminder—not that one is needed—that O'Connor is one profoundly talented musician. But so are the others: "Ruby, Are You Mad at Your Man?," popularized by The Osborne Brothers, Buck Owens and others, is a

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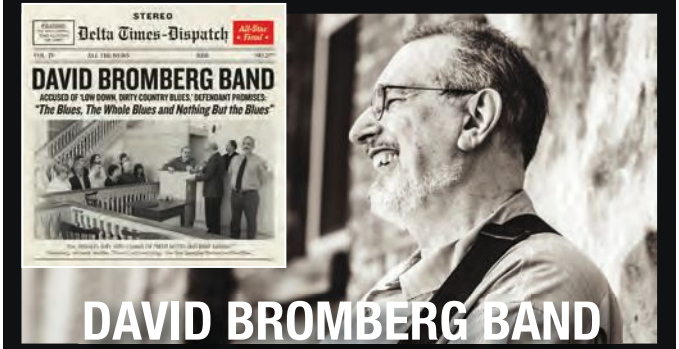

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standout. Taken at a whiplash-inducing pace, mandolin and fiddles whooshing by, it's about as simple a sentiment as you'll ever find in a song—unrequited love—but it'll never get old as long as players and singers with these skills and this level of devotion keep it alive. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Daniel Martin Moore
Archives Vol. II - Old Stepstone
SOFABURN/OK RECORDINGS

When it comes to precision and purpose, **Daniel Martin Moore** could never be accused of being a slacker. Each of his albums—*Golden Age* in particular—have shown his knack for shaping arrangements that create just the ideal illumination for his plaintive melodies. It's something of a revelation then to find him operating in the stripped-down setting that accompanies these primitive home recordings. Composed of traditional tunes that affirm the archival intent, it's mostly burnished with no more than vocal and guitar, requiring one to lean in and listen. Many of the songs fail to rise above a whisper, and with the exceptions of "Give Me Your Heart" and "Jubilee," the sound is solemn and subdued, as befitting these stark set-ups. An occasional whistle, incidental harmony and hint of a rhythm add the only variation, but it's the purity and sincerity of Moore's delivery that give "One Morning in May," "Storms Are on the Ocean" and "In the Shadow of the Pines" their sepia-tinted charm. That stoic sensibility also provides the material with a nocturnal quality that leaves its own idyllic impression. A quiet respite in these troublesome times, *Archives Vol. II* is both supple and sublime. *Lee Zimmerman*

William Tyler
Modern Country MERGE

William Tyler
Live at Third Man Records
THIRD MAN RECORDS

The material for *Modern Country* was written while guitarist and composer **William Tyler** was holed up in a quiet cabin in Mississippi. The music is inspired by the idea of a remote and backroad America—an older, slower country of cars and farms and local stores. The instrumental sounds on this lovely record conjure a sense of the open road, big skies and vastness bordering on intimidating emptiness. It can evoke quietly lush countrypolitan production or the soothing acoustic guitar music from mid-'80s Windham Hill Records. Though it's not as neutered as that, Tyler has a Zen pace. There's less of the ominous, swarming drone heard on his *Deseret Canyon*, re-released last year. There are several remarkable things about this record. The guitar suggests country music, with careful fingerpicking and a bright flickering tone, and then drifts into abstract atmospherics without ever seeming to be disjoined. And the whole mix on the album is astonishing, with the drums (played by Wilco's **Glenn Kotche**) providing surprising drive while subdued by mallets or pressed down in the dynamic range. (Listen to what amounts to a kind of deconstructed Afrobeat pattern on the expansive opener, "Highway Anxiety.") *Modern Country* is something like the mystic vision of America that U2 set out to make when they did *The Joshua Tree*, only played from the inside, minus the grandiosity and the vocals. Tyler's *Live at Third Man Records*—which is raw, unlayered, virtuosic and restrained—provides an informative counterpoint to the almost-ambient studio record. Tyler can do American Primitive, or he can do new-age-ish chillout. He can make a single guitar (and a nice reverb-y amp) sound as wide-open and void-suggesting as his work with a whole band. Tyler has built a bridge between regions that might not have seemed connected before. *John Adamian*

Zomba Prison Project
I Will Not Stop Singing SIX DEGREES

Zomba prison is located in Malawi, the poorest nation on Earth. The inmates there live in poverty, often going without food for two or three days. Producer **Ian Brennan** and his wife, filmmaker **Marilena Delli**, visited the prison in 2013 and 2016 to record prisoners and officers performing together. This sequel to their first Grammy-nominated album, *I Have No Everything Here*, is just as powerful, with 14 poignant performances that often bring you close to tears. Despite their physical hardships, the inmates play gentle music, full of quiet hope. **Elias Chimwali** delivers the a cappella "Sister, Take Good Care of Your Husband" with a hushed intensity that taps into the African roots of the blues. **Chisomo Chipembere**'s "Ambush of the Slaves" is an uptempo tune, with rippling electric guitars, minimal percussion, lively singing and a sprightly whistled solo. The R&B/reggae hybrid "Leave My Daughter Alone" features a staccato electric guitar figure, a melodic bass line and sharp lead vocals by **Vincent Saulos**, with several women providing harmony vocals. **Thomas Binamo** uses impressive acoustic fingerpicking to deliver "I Will Never Stop Grieving for You, My Wife," a lament leavened by the obvious love in the singer's voice. **Chikondi Salanje** offers a bluesy, understated acoustic guitar riff on "I Will Not Return to Prison," recorded a few days before he was finally released from Zomba. *J. Poet*

Amanda Shires
My Piece of Land SILVER KNIFE

It seems logical that **Amanda Shires** would be thinking about domesticity lately. She and husband Jason Isbell are raising a baby daughter while keeping pace with careers that find the family separated for months at a time. Consequently, it's little wonder then that her striking new album, *My Piece of Land*, places a heavy focus on themes that center around the home and the hearth. Several of its songs make direct reference—"My Love (The Storm)," "When You're Gone," "You Are My Home" and especially "Mineral Wells," named for the little Texas town where she lived as a child. Nevertheless, it was the need to find the safety and security that eluded her after her parents' divorce that inspires this material, which finds her focusing on immediate concerns. In that sense, the album provides a link between past and

present. It's a poignant collection to be sure, but the optimism in Shires' delivery mutes any sense of remorse, making the material sound tender rather than troubled, offering a wistful view of an imperfect past that allows hope for the future. Shires' best solo work to date, *My Piece of Land* makes it clear that she's no longer residing in her husband's shadow. ***Lee Zimmerman***

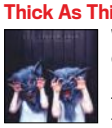
Syd Arthur

Apricity HARVEST

On their dynamic fourth LP, Canterbury quartet **Syd Arthur** remains untethered to the past or present, continuing to refine their fusion of prog, psych-pop, jazz and folk. Much fuss has been made over the band's lineage, both geographical (following '70s legends like Caravan and Soft Machine) and genetic (violinist-keyboardist **Raven Bush** is the nephew of art-pop legend Kate Bush). But *Apricity*, like its stellar predecessor, 2014's *Sound Mirror*, uses those influences only as a launching pad. The space-funk of "No Peace" recalls vintage Canterbury Scene quirkiness, but infused with the stoned groove of psychedelic peers Tame Impala. There are moments of pure muscle flexing—like droning instrumental "Portal," a synth-heavy exploration set in 7/8. And Bush's strings offer the band a classically trained regality—like the eerie textures of "Into Eternity" and surging counterpoint of "Coal Mine." But even at their densest, Syd Arthur never pounds on for more than five minutes, and **Liam Magill**'s bluesy croon roots these songs in the verse-chorus format. (See: stutter-stepping single "Sun Rays.") Syd Arthur is a rare beast: ornate enough for classic prog fans, catchy enough for modern-rock radio. ***Ryan Reed***

The Temper Trap

Thick As Thieves GLASSNOTE



When you make your grand entrance soundtracking a Diet Coke commercial, it's tough to earn a long leash for experimentation. Just ask **The Temper Trap**, the Australian alt-rock outfit still straining to expand beyond their euphoric, U2-ripping debut single, "Sweet Disposition." On their self-titled 2012 LP, the band glossed up riff-rock anthems with synths and programmed beats—but the critics balked, so they've responded by appeasing the Diet-Coke-heads. There's a whiff of desperation with the guitar-heavy *Thick As Thieves*, which features outside songwriting contributions from heavyweights like Ben Allen (Animal Collective) and Malay (Frank Ocean). And the band is too content sticking to their tried-and-true formula: Generic fist-pumpers like "Burn" and "Alive" rehash the same quiet-loud guitar dynamics with diminishing returns. **Dougy Mandagi**'s quivering falsetto is The Temper Trap's not-so-secret weapon—and the most dynamic tracks allow it to soar. On "Summer's Almost Gone," he wails over a simmering soft-rock groove, and power ballad "Closer" builds restrained yearning into an epic finale. When firing on all cylinders, The Temper Trap make arena rock cool again. They just have to keep tweaking that sugary recipe. ***Ryan Reed***

OFF THE TRACKS

Hamish Anderson

Trouble

SELF-RELEASED

Guitarist and singer-songwriter **Hamish Anderson** hails from Melbourne, Australia, but his music is steeped in the American blues tradition. Anderson had the honor of being the last artist to open up for the late blues master B.B. King, and he also went on tour in support of Stephen Stills' recent project The Rides, but this fall's *Trouble* marks Anderson's debut full-length release. It officially introduces the world to his brand of earnest songwriting, which is firmly rooted in the tradition of legends like King. The album starts out with the title track, a strutting, dingy-guitar-fueled single well fleshed out with steady organ, and while Anderson can stray toward more Tom Petty-leaning writing, like in the defiant "Never See You Again," his bread and butter is clearly still his passion for the various forms of blues. He demonstrates his mastery of the genre on two standard tracks: the barroom-stomping "Hold on Me," which features a guest turn from Los Lobos' **Steve Berlin** on baritone sax, and "Am I a Good Man," a showcase for his smoldering vocals and guitar heroics. ***Matt Inman***

Karl Blau

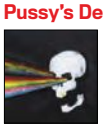
Introducing Karl Blau

RAVEN MARCHING BAND/BELLA UNION

There's humor in that title. Thousands of fans don't need an introduction to **Karl Blau**'s talents. Blau has long been a prolific contributor to the world of West Coast independent music, both as an insanely wide-ranging sideman and as a solo artist. He's played with Laura Veirs, Little Wings, Earth and dozens of others. And this is a record of covers, so it's actually an introduction to Blau's exquisite singing and his skills as an insightful interpreter of other people's songs. The emotional centerpiece of the record is the opener, Tom T. Hall's "That's How I Got to Memphis," a masterpiece of deluded, unreliable narration, and a song that Blau recorded with producer **Tucker Martine** nearly 10 years ago. It's the album's sourdough starter. What's remarkable is how Blau threads the songs—by the Bee Gees, Townes Van Zandt, Waylon Jennings and others—into a sort of heartbreaking narrative of loss, longing, regret, love, family, sadness and hope. It's country soul with a sepia halo of AM radio nostalgia. Blau's baritone is an expressive marvel, serving as a deep anchor, but also moving through surprising, mini flourishes. More people should be introduced to Blau, and this is a fine way to do the trick. ***John Adamian***

Autolux

Pussy's Dead 30TH CENTURY



Pussy's Dead, the third album from Los Angeles band **Autolux**, opens with a bold statement. Over a cascade of static and shoegazy noise rock, singer **Eugene Goreshter** asserts: "It's so

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so sad to be happy all the time." It's the sort of sentiment you'd expect from the group, who revel in moody soundscapes that often feel like the perfect antithesis to buoyant radio pop. This album, a belated follow-up to their 2010 effort, *Transit Transit*, extends a more experimental leaning than Autolux's prior contributions, even on single "Soft Scene." Guitars rise and fall and dissolve into static as drummer **Carla Azar**—one of the band's greatest assets, particularly live—continuously shifts the beat, each song refusing to adhere to any specific expectation for what a song should be. "Junk for Code" muddles the vocals into the instrumentals, blurring the distinction between what is said and what is conveyed, while "Brainwasher" plays with the possible motion of sound. Autolux seems to know the real truth: It would be so so sad to play it safe all the time. ***Emily Zemler***

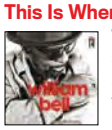
Grant Farm

Kiss the Ground GRANT CENTRAL

Grant Farm is the brainchild of national flatpicking champion **Tyler Grant**, although it's the entire quartet's skill set that has made them a pillar of the Colorado music scene. *Kiss the Ground* is the Americana act's first full-length themed album, an "ode to the working people." It's an appropriate soundtrack to an era that bred Bernie Sanders and widespread societal discontent. Vocal duties on the 12 tracks are shared between Grant, **Adrian Engfer** (bass) and **Kevin McHugh** (keys), meaning the harmonies on downtempo "Monarch King Meets His Maker" are commonplace. A standout is "The Keg," which captures the laid-back, American rock-and-roll that the band exudes live—summer nights in Western mountain towns, Coors and all that. "Fill Your Cup" channels that vibe, too—"Flat tire on your Chevy truck/ got you stuck in Tennessee"—but hits deeper, painting bad luck as a motivator. In a similar vein, "Fireflies" serves as a reminder that even when life is shit, you can find solace. "I Wish That It Would Rain" closes the album on a soaring guitar solo, although the true last track is a radio edit of the first, "Get in Line." The message: If salvation's what you're looking for, then you're not alone. ***Kiran Herbert***

William Bell

This Is Where I Live STAX



William Bell never achieved the level of success enjoyed by fellow Stax Records heavies like Otis Redding, Sam & Dave or Booker T. & the MG's, but his exemplary output for the archetypal Memphis soul label in the '60s—Bell was one of the first to score a charting single for Stax (1961's "You Don't Miss Your Water")—is rightly cherished by acolytes of the genre. Bell remained with Stax until it closed its doors in 1975, and now he's back with the reactivated label. *This Is Where I Live* is the work of an artist who has never forgotten who he is or where he came from, entirely true to the spirit of those early sides, but very much of its time as well. Bell's new music finds him rich in voice and surrounded by sympathetic players—particularly producer **John Leventhal** on guitars, keys, bass, drums and more—who understand innately how to bring out the depth and honesty within. "The Three of Me," the lead-off track, is typical, balancing the sweet and tough in equal measure, while the funky title track, packed with robust horns, is dance-floor-perfect. And the now-77 Bell's take on "Born Under a Bad Sign," the Albert King classic he co-wrote, is bound to have you rethinking the song from the ground up. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Alex Bleeker

Bet Your Ass LONG LIVE DEATH

Alex Bleeker, bassist of Real Estate and leader of his own Freaks, has never sounded more peaceful and easy. Though the word "outlaw" recurs on half of the six songs of Bleeker's *Bet Your Ass* EP, the music and most of the lyrics suggest a more laid-back existence. Built on a template of gentle drum-machine folk, *Bet Your Ass* moves from perhaps the world's mellowest song about drunk driving ("Drinkin and Drivin'") to Ween-like instrumentals ("Psychic Outlaw"). Using a preset beat seemingly straight off a Casio keyboard for the collection's title track, the down-home charm lands somewhere between the country-soul wisdom of the early '70s Beach Boys and the elevated grace of John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High." The wisdom doesn't always make it across, as on the opening "Mesa Blue," perhaps more a mood than a specific expression. But it's a formula that Bleeker more or less perfects for the disc-closing cover of Little Wings' "Faith Children," a soft and vaguely surf-pop hymnal with a pleasing tumble of syllables crunched into a rising melody that lands Bleeker's voice just near the edge of its range, like someone at the edge of their particular self and looking beyond. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Red Hot Chili Peppers

The Getaway WARNER BROS.

Few alt-rock bands have evolved in such an innately human way as the **Red Hot Chili Peppers**. The California lifers blasted through adolescence with youthful aggression and pent-up energy; they wandered through young adulthood with some hits and misses before settling into a mellower, more mature and uber-consistent groove with albums like *By the Way* and *Stadium Arcadium*. Since 1999's milestone *Californication*, the Peppers have often sounded subdued—like adulthood duties kept them from getting bratty. Produced by **Danger Mouse**, *The Getaway* isn't the return to spastic form that it's been hailed as, but it does bring some heat. On tracks like "Dark Necessities" and "Goodbye Angels," the band whips up emotional, sweeping choruses

with pounding bass. But only on "This Ticonderoga" do they truly cut loose and go wild—fittingly, it's a tune where newest member, guitarist **Josh Klinghoffer**, takes over. There's certainly more to chew on here than on the bland *I'm With You* from five years ago; most of the album's 13 tracks successfully build infectious micro-grooves around **Flea**'s iconic slap-bass and the rhythmic wordplay of **Anthony Kiedis**. But there's little new ground covered on *The Getaway*, and only modest retreats to former glories. The album is good—exactly as you'd expect it to be. ***Justin Jacobs***

Shawn Colvin & Steve Earle

Colvin & Earle FANTASY

Earlier this year, Light in the Attic reissued the 1981 film *Heartworn Highways*. Filmed by director James Szalapski in late 1975 and early 1976, it documents the vanguard of the then-emerging outlaw country scene—pickers like Guy Clark, Townes Van Zandt, Steve Young and other hardscrabble types. Among them was a fresh-faced singer-songwriter named **Steve Earle**, playing a loose living room jam among Clark, Rodney Crowell and other guests. Singer-songwriter **Shawn Colvin** doesn't appear in the film—she was kicking around Texas with her band the Dixie Diesels at the time—but *Colvin & Earle*, their new duet recording, taps into the same homey vibe captured on camera. Recorded in producer **Buddy Miller**'s living room, it finds the old friends—whose creative partnership stretches back to the late '80s—in a relaxed pose. Here, Colvin's voice plays dulcet to Earle's snarl. Their take on the Stones' "Ruby Tuesday" is pretty, their reading of Emmylou Harris' "Raise the Dead" is sublime, and the originals, like "Come What May" and "The Way That We Do," are low-key charms. But it's most exciting when they get heavy: "You're Right (I'm Wrong)" slinks with dread and sounds like it may has been culled from a recent Low record.
Jason Woodbury

Brian Eno

The Ship WARP

Four years ago, the layered soundscapes of *Lux* marked **Brian Eno**'s return to a rigorous minimalism that drew comparisons to his ambient classic *Discreet Music*. On the opening title track to *The Ship*, the mission feels more episodic than strictly ambient, with The Domed One creating a sense of being alone and adrift on open water until six minutes in, when his timbre-processed voice intones a languid sea shanty. ("The ship was from the willing land/ The waves about it rolled...") The melody gradually gives way to an undulating swell of synth pads, simulated sonar pings, disjointed radio broadcasts and other vocal fragments. "Wave after wave after wave," he whispers, his voice now pitched downward and, suddenly, the central theme—our indefatigable will in the face of forces beyond our control—appears out of the sonic fog like a ghost ship. For all his reliance on synthesis as a compositional tool, Eno's music remains remarkably warm-blooded and emotional. The second half of *The Ship* is a three-part piece called "Fickle Sun"—the first dark and menacing, the second a quiet meditation (with British actor **Peter Serafinowicz** reciting a cut-up poem over Eno's stately piano) and the third a version of The Velvet Underground's "I'm Set Free" that recalls Eno's post-Roxy Music work, when he still sounded like a rock singer. It's a surprising taste of the familiar for an artist who's made a career out of the unpredictable.
Bill Murphy

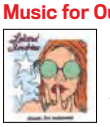
Islands

Taste/Should I Remain Here at Sea? MANQUE

"The way that this ship moves, bound for deep water/ It's bound to break/ Will you, will you remember how I loved you?" **Nick Thorburn** croons over swaying wave synths, a seafarer drifting with his misery. "Now I know how this water got so blue." It's the saddest he's ever sounded—quite a feat since he's spent his last two LPs (2012's *A Sleep & A Forgetting* and 2013's *Ski Mask*) wallowing in heartbreak over a failed relationship. His new twin LPs, *Taste* and *Should I Remain Here at Sea?*, mine their fair share of angst. But unlike that previous **Islands** double whammy, these albums explore two distinct musical moods: *Here at Sea* is mostly raw, live-on-the-floor rock, with even the jokes offering a mournful sting; *Taste* is built on glossy programmed drums and vintage synthesizers, where even bittersweet ballads ("Pumpkin") are bathed in a neon glow. It's a testament to Thorburn's craftsmanship that both sets occupy their own distinct atmospheres—but after the gloom of his recent work, the seductive *Taste* naturally separates itself, showcasing Islands' unheralded affinity for groove. Unlike most indie-rockers mining new wave and synth-pop, Thorburn rises above pastiche, navigating the verse-chorus contours of experts like Ric Ocasek. *Here at Sea* percolates when he gets pissed-off—like on the riff showcase "Fear," which chronicles the drive-by assassination of the American Dream. As with most double LPs, separated or not, this would make one lethal 40-minute track list. But the verve of the sharpest songs is a positive sign: After years drifting at sea, Thorburn is setting his sights on dry land.
Ryan Reed

Leland Sundries

Music for Outcasts L'ECHIQUIER



Logic might dictate that **Leland Sundries**, the band led by publicist-turned-musician **Nick Loss-Eaton**, came about from lessons learned in the biz, where demographics, trends and hairstyles assure instant infatuation. In fact, that couldn't be further from the truth, given the ragtag approach and scattershot arrangements that dominate this, a belated follow-up to their *Foundry* EP from four years back. True, the group has opted for slightly more cohesion here, be it in the straight-ahead stance that drives opening track "Apocalypse Love Song," the twisted country narrative "Maps of the West" or the assured stomp of "Radiator Sabotage." Mostly though, Loss-Eaton and company avoid predictability, occasionally descending into cacophony via "Wallace, ID" and "Greyhound from Reno," before

Red Hot Chili Peppers

tearing up the boards with the Dolls/Clash-like opus "Bad Hair Day." The unhurried shuffle of "Freckle Blues" and forlorn tones of "Keys in the Boot" allow for brief respites, but still pay homage to an upturned middle finger that resides at the center of their sound. Ultimately, *Music for Outcasts* finds truth in its title, its shifting sentiments veering well beyond the mainstream. Those prone to coloring outside the lines will have cause to give a decided nod of approval.
Lee Zimmerman

Ben Watt

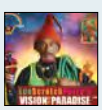
Fever Dream UNMADE ROAD

Sixteen years after the demise of Everything but the Girl, **Ben Watt** returns as a singer-songwriter with his third collection of atmospheric tracks. Folk, jazz and rock collide in this album, tracing the course of a relationship as it slowly unravels. It was recorded live in the studio with the full band to capture the intimate feeling of the lyrics. Watt's voice is a whisper throughout, a presence that describes the end of love with a weary resignation. The ironic lyric of "Gradually" finds Watt comparing fading love with the slowly growing passion of infatuation. The rage, hurt and confusion is expressed by **Bernard Butler**'s electric guitar, adding icy fills and bursts of distorted noise to intensify Watt's insightful words, as he does throughout the album. "Winter's Eve" is a meditation on the loss one feels at the end of an affair. Watt's solemn acoustic piano and almost inaudible vocal capture the desolation you feel when you know a relationship is over before you're ready to say goodbye. Some light finally breaks through in "New Year of Grace." The aching melody and Butler's bluesy, sustained notes support Watt's reminders that love rewards those who have the courage to stay the course. ***J. Poet***

Lee Perry

Lee Scratch Perry's Vision of Paradise

CADIZ MUSIC/ENTERTAINMENT ONE



Without **Lee Perry**, there would be no dub, the deconstructive production technique that laid the foundation for techno, hip-hop, remixing and the use of the recording studio as an instrument. The records that Perry produced at his Black Ark studio for Bob Marley, Max Romeo, The Heptones and many others sound as fresh and modern today as they did 40 years ago. A documentary that digs into Perry's music, the genesis of his studio technique and the creation of his amazing house band, The Upsetters, would be a revelation, but director **Volker Schaner**'s film barely touches on those subjects. Instead, Schaner and his camera follow Perry around on his day-to-day business, lobbing softball questions his way and recording his endless, oblique and often incomprehensible answers. Schaner's infatuation with Perry's genius gets in the way of the film's narrative structure—what there is of it. Instead, we see close-ups that go on too long, listening to Perry's shamanistic musings—a confluence of biblical, mystical and Rastafarian prophecies and revelations. The film opens with an interviewer asking Perry if he's crazy. His long, poetic answer does have a taste of madness but, as the film unspools, it becomes clear that Perry's word salad may be just as much performance art as it is anything else. His state of mind is just one more question that Schaner's worshipful film never answers. ***J. Poet***

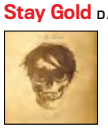
Cymbals Eat Guitars

Pretty Years SINDERLYN

With 2014's *LOSE*, indie-rock philosopher **Joseph D'Agostino** crafted a woeful yet celebratory eulogy for a late friend. The fourth **Cymbals Eat Guitars** LP mourns a different sort of death: "Goodbye to my dancing days," the guitarist yelps over loping drums and frizzled Rhodes. "Goodbye to my pretty years." Across 10 turbulent tracks, D'Agostino and company transform existential angst into communal catharsis—recounting post-Columbine nightmares (piano ballad "Mallwalking"), bizarre tour stories (distorted psych sing-along "4th of July, Philadelphia (SANDY)" and assorted reflections on mortality. Like *LOSE* before it, *Pretty Years* is full of surprising musical touches—from the woozy synthesizers of "Close" to the atonal free-jazz skronk that decorates "Wish." Producer **John Congleton** emphasizes the band's muscle—even the spaciest sections of Springsteen-tinged epic "WELL" punch through with a force suited for classic-rock radio. The album's emotional centerpiece is the aforementioned "4th of July"—D'Agostino looks back fondly on a wild night of youthful insanity with tourmate Alex G, but he can't suppress his melancholy for the passing of time. "My life is sliding by," he sighs, depressed that he can't add more poignancy to life's simple moments. Ironically, he's done exactly that—through song. ***Ryan Reed***

Butch Walker

Stay Gold DANGERBIRD



Butch Walker is a consistent, prolific musician, delivering well-crafted, thoughtful albums on an almost yearly basis. His latest effort, *Stay Gold*, draws its immediate inspiration from *The Outsiders*, taking its title (and the lyrics for opening track "Stay Gold") from the novel's infamous line "Stay gold, Ponyboy." The album is more celebratory and bright than Walker's previous, last year's *Afraid of Ghosts*, which documented the death of his father. Here, the musician deals with his own mortality and takes an optimistic view on what's to come. The folk-laden, punk-rock songs, which pull in elements of Americana, are invigorated and propulsive, especially on numbers like "Wilder in the Heart," a track that reflects back on younger years. "East Coast Girl," the album's flagship single, is an acoustic rocker that asserts what appears to be Walker's central thesis. As the song unfolds, the musician croons, "If you make it this far without killing yourself/ You got it made," a line that takes on various incarnations throughout the rest of the songs. Walker is clearly reflective—but no longer in a mournful way—and his own moments of clarity translate to the listener. Here he is, eight solo albums in, and he's found truth in his experiences, even if some of the stories are just stories for the sake of narrative. The album concludes with quiet, country-tinged acoustic ballad "Record Store," which punctuates Walker's thoughts by poignantly comparing a lost love to the disappearance of record shops. ***Emily Zemler***

Whitehorse

The Northern South Vol. 1

SIX SHOOTER

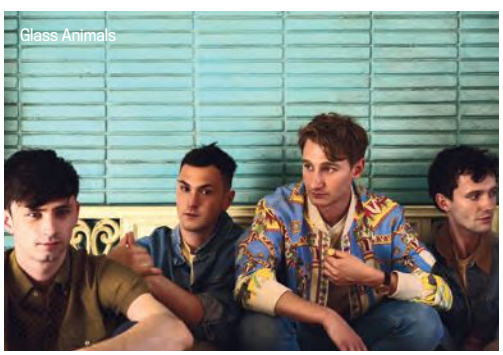
Blues duos are plentiful these days, as it's a format popularized in recent times by The White Stripes and The Black Keys. **Whitehorse** falls within the requirements of the definition, but it is in name only. While the previously mentioned bands worked the drum-and-guitar platform, Whitehorse utilizes dual axes, with touches of harmonica, banjos and the occasional drum machine filtering through the mix. Taking their name from one of their country's northernmost cities, Canadians **Luke Doucet** and **Melissa McClelland** have a sound that's gritty, earthy, fuzzy and fierce in a laid-back manner. They focus this effort on the Chess and Checker Records catalogs, generating a sound bigger than the sum of their parts through live looping, two-part harmonies and masterful vocal interplay. Little Walter's "My Babe" falls under a delicious fuzz-tone spell, while Koko Taylor's signature "Wang Dang Doodle" comes across with haunting vocals and psychedelic lope. Jimmy Reed's classic "Big Boss Man" is reborn under the steel-guitar slide mastery of Doucet and back-and-forth vocal exchanges; the slow dirge-stomping beat, fuzzy slide guitar and tripped-out vocals—of Robert Johnson's "Come on in My Kitchen" is as haunting as Johnson's legend. With *The Northern South Vol. 1*, Whitehorse provides a fresh take on the blues. ***Glenn BurnSilver***

Glass Animals

How to Be a Human Being

WOLF TONE/CAROLINE

There was a distinct strangeness present on **Glass Animals**' 2014 debut, *Zaba*. With its elements of psychedelia, when the album dropped, it felt like you had never heard the sounds that emerged from it—at least not in that incarnation—before. But the U.K. group's sophomore effort, *How to Be a Human Being*, often lacks that element of surprise and eccentricity. That doesn't mean that this isn't a solid, interesting album but, in some ways, the music here feels like the product of a band that is trying to become more conventional the second time around. *How to Be a Human Being*, produced by lead singer **David Bayley**, has a lot of sameness, with many tracks embodying a similar tone and tempo. There is respite with "Cane Shuga," which finds those buoyant electronic mood moments heard on *Zaba* and embraces unusual vocal elements, and with closing number "Agnes," an ambient number more interested in atmosphere than melody. "Life Itself," the album's first single, opens with an engaging primal beat, reminiscent of Hot Chip, but those who wanted more songs like "Gooey" will be disappointed. For all of the promise of "Life Itself" and its beat, the song becomes a radio track, focused on a sing-along chorus instead of a sense of musical innovation. ***Emily Zemler***



Sonny & The Sunsets

Moods Baby Moods POLYVINYL

Sonny & The Sunsets have always been an eclectic combo, mainly because their namesake possesses a restless spirit and willful wanderlust. Storytelling is part of the process as well; the band's last album, *Talent Night at the Ashram*, spotlighted an array of fictional characters that had no apparent connection, other than the fact they all inhabited the same album. Following closely on the heels of **Sonny Smith**'s solo album—the wordless *Sees All Knows All*, released earlier this year—*Moods Baby Moods* comes across as a beat-heavy, middle-fingered rebuke to anyone hoping they'd either refine their MO or adopt a more concise sensibility. Songs such as "Death Cream, Pt. 2" and "Moods" infuse hip-hop rhythms at a pace that falls midway between a saunter and a swagger, resulting in a sound that bolsters the band's street cred and affirms their upstart image. Consequently, it's little surprise to find society taken to task on tracks like "Modern Age," "White Cops on Trial" and "Reject of the Lowest Planet." All the while, they bring to mind the razor-sharp riffing and loose-limbered grooves reminiscent of Prince and Talking Heads. Both spunky and funky, these *Moods* beget a party with a purpose. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Angelo Moore & The Brand New Step

Centuries of Heat ROPEADOPE

With a bit of Prince and Sly Stone in his bones (so to speak), **Angelo Moore** has spent more than 30 years injecting some serious frontman funk into the house-on-fire sound of Fishbone, culminating in 1991's *The Reality of My Surroundings*, still widely considered the band's magnum opus. That same commitment to keeping the party loud, lively and politically engaged helps fuel *Centuries of Heat*, which finds Moore stretching out with the able-bodied **Rondo Brothers (Jim Greer** and **Brandon Arnovick)** behind the console. There's a tightly mixed, hot-buttered soul flavor to the opener "Gratitude," a very literal thank-you song that chronicles Moore's roller coaster ride of the last few years. ("Up and over the hump with the Kickstarter campaign," he sings, followed by "and when they tried to shut me down, you had my back and gave support," referring to the drawn-out stage-diving lawsuit that nearly broke Fishbone.) Switching gears, the title track takes up the theme of worldwide terrorist upheaval over a relentless James Brown-style jungle groove. And it's change-ups like these, from the mind-tripping "Feel the Energy" (with **Stanton Moore** on drums) to the hip-hopping "Booty Bang" (featuring Oakland's own **Boots Riley** and **Casual**), that show Angelo at his best: the sly ringmaster amid the chaos, chomping at the bit for his next act. ***Bill Murphy***

Mutual Benefi

Skip a Sinking Stone MOM + POP

Jordan Lee's second album commences with "Madrugada," a back-porch, baroque-folk meditation populated with acoustic fingerpicking, strings and the soft rustle of wind chimes. It's the sonic equivalent of a late-afternoon nap—and the dominant atmosphere of *Skip a Sinking Stone*. The LP's drowsy first half evokes the love (both romantic and critical) that Lee experienced after touring behind his acclaimed 2013 debut, *Love's Crushing Diamond*. "You are the first thing I want to see/ When I open my eyes, when I wake from a dream," he chirps through polite twang on "Skipping Stones," as if singing those words in bed between yawns. But that pastoral sweetness morphs into loneliness on the album's second side, in which ghostly keyboard loops ("Fire Escape") and muted brass ("Slow March") break up the cooing and cricket sounds. The conversation rarely rises above a whisper throughout, but Lee generates substantial catharsis from his patiently unfurling arrangements. By album's end, as cinematic harps whisk you away into "The Hereafter," the mood feels not grim but softly celebratory—a tranquil eulogy for a full heart. ***Ryan Reed***

Trapper Schoepp

Rangers & Valentines XTRA MILE

A true pop provocateur, **Trapper Schoepp** hits all the right hooks on his stunning sophomore set, recalling the best of Badfinger, the Raspberries, The Beach Boys and others of that ilk known for their radio-ready melodies. Granted, Schoepp had some help; Raconteur **Brendan Benson** sits behind the boards, while members of The Hold Steady, Superdrag and the McCrary Sisters lend assists. Still, given the sumptuous tunes and exuberant refrains, Schoepp's skill as a songwriter is the thing that gives this album such a flourish. It starts on a celebratory note with the solid one-two punch of "Mono Pt. II" and "Tornado Alley" and doesn't let up from there, elevating the energy by way of unabashed rockers like "Don't Go" and "Settlin' or Sleepin' Around," the latter accompanied by a clunky cowbell. Schoepp dips into country, honky-tonk and folkie sounds along the way, but his enthusiasm never falters. The wry half-spoken ramble of "Talking Girlfriend Blues" provides a hint of his humor, as does "For Jonny" ("I hit the town but the town hit me back"), which adds attitude and swagger for good measure. The Dylanesque designs of "Dream" seal the deal. *Rangers & Valentines* is Trapper Schoepp's mini masterpiece. ***Lee Zimmerman***

URBAN LEGEND

Photo courtesy of inventor Ken Schaffer (on right.) August 24, 1977, Palladium, New York City.

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Brad Mehldau Trio

Blues and Ballads NONESUCH

Prior to the release of any new set by **Brad Mehldau**, there's a good bit of guesswork that goes on among the pianist's faithful: Will he fill this one with his own compositions or a new collection of interpretations? And if the latter, what will they be—he's taken on everyone from Nick Drake to Radiohead, Coltrane to Monk and, of course, the Great American Songbook standards—and how will he approach them? Mehldau has long favored the trio format, and he returns to it here, surrounding himself with the familiar company of bassist **Larry Grenadier** and drummer **Jeff Ballard**. The seven tracks run the gamut from The Beatles' "And I Love Her" to Charlie Parker's "Cheryl"—the former assuming a near-Ramsey Lewis Trio looseness and the latter projecting a devilish wit amid its forward-propulsion swing. "Since I Fell for You," the ballad that opens the set, is imbued with sentimentality and enchantment and is followed by Cole Porter's "I Concentrate on You," which allows each trio member a decent amount of space to roam, even while retaining its sparseness. The most surprising song choice, but an absolutely fitting one, is Paul McCartney's recent solo tune "My Valentine." Mehldau and company bring to it a refinement so tender and formal, you'll think you're listening to a music box. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Richard Ashcroft

These People COOKING VINYL

British rockcrits used to take great delight in calling him Mad Richard, but eccentricity is the least of what makes **Richard Ashcroft**'s solo work so compelling. Now seven years removed from the high-profile reunion and inevitable crack-up of The Verve, the mercurial singer is still searching for the ultra-heavy, and it's his undaunted will to keep creating, with the talent to back it up, that pushes *These People* into yet another swath of rarified air. At times pastoral and summery, it's an odd and unexpected turn into troubadour territory. But with the lush string arrangements of **Wil Malone** (who worked on the Verve's breakthrough *Urban Hymns*, as well as Ashcroft's own *Human Conditions*) and the beats, bass and electronic flourishes that Ashcroft applied in his home studio with longtime co-producer **Chris Potter**, the album comes across as though a full band recorded it. As usual, Ashcroft's indelible voice drives the narrative, from the dance-floor apocalypse of "Hold On" to the soul-stirring remembrances of departed friends in "Picture of You" and "Black Lines." For a guy who was often savaged in the tabloids for his delusions of grandeur, these days, he sounds refreshingly, and remarkably, human. ***Bill Murphy***

Plundering the Vaults

Charlie Parker

Unheard Bird: The Unissued Takes

VERVE/UME

How is it possible, one might reasonably ask, that 58 previously unreleased recordings by **Charlie Parker**—who died in 1955—managed to stay hidden until now? The tracks on this new two-CD collection, which also includes another 11 that have seen the light of day before, apparently came from the archives of the late Verve Records founder **Norman Granz**. The liner notes, by longtime jazz historian **Phil Schaap**, don't delve into where the tapes have been squirreled away all these years but, in any case, it's a significant find. Significant, but not game-changing. Cut between 1949-52, the newly unearthed tracks vary in both audio and performance quality, and many are incomplete snippets or false starts, works-in-progress not always worth hearing more than once—except for the most die-hard of Bird-ophiles. But among the full alternate takes, there are gems to be discovered: small group and orchestral numbers, Latin-tinged jams and more. One of the first here is an alternate of "Visa," a 1949 track by a swinging septet featuring trumpeter **Kenny Dorham** and trombonist **Tommy Turk** among its stellar cast. Backed by an ace rhythm section (including drummer **Max Roach**), the horn men trade solos that are just different enough from the master take to draw attention to their creative instincts. A 1950 all-star quartet, with **Buddy Rich** drumming, also satisfies. Later in the set, a series of collaborations between Parker and the equally celebrated **Dizzy Gillespie** add context to their already legendary sessions, but some of the most revealing music comes at the tail end: fascinating alternate takes of Parker's sassy, brassy renditions of three swinging Cole Porter numbers: "Night and Day," "Almost Like Being in Love" and "What Is This Thing Called Love." ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Blind Boys of Alabama

Spirit of the Century OMNIVORE

Higher Ground OMNIVORE

An American institution, the **Blind Boys of Alabama** tap tradition in a contemporary context. Their following was once confined to sacred circles, but they have not only narrowed the divide between the spiritual and the secular, but also often eliminate it entirely. The re-release of two of their most defining albums, *Spirit of the Century* and *Higher Ground* (from 2001 and 2002, respectively), proves that point completely. Made up of songs that convey an upward gaze, they lean toward standards that strike a reverential note with fervent believers and pop purists alike. Consequently, each offers the potential for a universal embrace, musically and emotionally. That's especially evident on *Higher Ground*, which revisits such common core classics as "People Get Ready," "Stand by Me," "Many Rivers to Cross" and "Higher Ground" through faith and tenacity that hew to that higher purpose. A cover of Prince's little-known "The Cross" further affirms the popular appeal, while the appearances of **Ben Harper** and **Robert Randolph** underscore the crossover connection. *Spirit of the Century* doesn't go quite as far in terms of content, but the inclusion of "Amazing Grace," "Nobody's Fault but Mine" and "Motherless Child" keeps the familiarity factor intact. Swing, soul, blues and gospel all converge, and whether it's a mournful melody or a jazzy romp, there's a full quotient of reverence and rejoicing, the sacred and the celebratory—all of which combine for a singular purpose. Both reissues also come well stocked with bonus live tracks recorded in the months following the studio sessions. They make acquisition all the more essential for devotees and new converts alike. ***Lee Zimmerman***

David Bowie

Who Can I Be Now? (1974 -1976)

PARLOPHONE

According to rock critic scripture, **David Bowie** was stuck in a "transitional" phase between 1974 and 1976—no longer the glam-rock revolutionary of *Ziggy Stardust*, not yet the Brian Eno sidekick who rebirthed art-rock in his own bizarre image. That sentiment rings true. None of Bowie's three studio LPs from that period—*Diamond Dogs*, *Young Americans* and *Station to Station*—are as shocking or sonically distinct as what preceded or followed them. But Bowie was an artist in permanent transition, always scratching an itch the world never knew it had. *Who Can I Be Now?*, the second in a series of retrospective box sets, celebrates this misunderstood period with a trio of live discs (including two versions of 1974's *David Live*), a 2010 *Station to Station* mix, a mid-decade best-of collection, *Re:Call 2*, and pseudo-released *Young Americans* precursor LP, *The Gouster*. None of that material is essential listening, but the trio of core studio albums are ripe for discovery. The post-apocalyptic musings of *Diamond Dogs* remain as compelling as *Ziggy Stardust*—from the title track's Stones-y surge to the "Shaft"-biting Space Age funk of "1984," the man never covered so much territory across one track list. While *Young Americans*' attempt at "plastic soul" reinvention still borders on camp, Bowie's funk fetish paid off with the **John Lennon**-assisted classic "Fame." And *Station to Station* hasn't lost its cocaine-addled brilliance, chasing The Thin White Duke down abstract alleyways of disco ("Golden Years") and experimental soul ("TVC15"). "Who can I be now?" Bowie asks on a bonus cut. The answer feels clear as ever: anything he wanted to be. ***Ryan Reed***

Miracle Legion

Portrait of a Damaged Family

MEZZOTINT

Miracle Legion almost seemed ill-fated from the start. Specializing in a poppy roots-rock hybrid, they attracted only scant attention prior to their parting of ways in 1996. Their final album, *Portrait of a Damaged Family*, was practically forgotten the moment the band splintered, with leader **Mark Mulcahy** turning his focus toward attaining solo success. Recently, the group reconvened, partially so that this final album could receive some renewed recognition. Consequently, it's been re-released and primed for proper promotion, perhaps resulting in the notice that eluded it before. The lure of a single bonus track may not help the cause, but the celebratory sound that characterized many of the original tracks could win over those willing to indulge in a fresh encounter. Indeed, while *Portrait* may have been Miracle Legion's swan song, it found them in full flight, purveying radiant, sometimes-raucous melodies tailor-made to attract the college crowd. "You're My Blessing," "Madison Park" and "I Wish I Was Danny Kaye" are the best of the bunch when it comes to that sheer, unbridled energy, but the whimsical "K.K.M." possesses a special allure all its own. Twenty years on, *Damaged Family*'s tattered reputation could be repaired at last. ***Lee Zimmerman***

The Allman Brothers Band

The Allman Brothers Band Vinyl Box Set UNIVERSAL

The latest release from **The Allman Brothers Band**'s vault revisits their glory years, 1969 -1979, back when they were one of the biggest bands in the country, racking up over 30 million in sales by the end of the decade. Massaged with an incredible attention to history and detail, Universal has remastered nine of the Brothers' classic-period albums from the original analog tapes and pressed them on audiophile quality 180-gram vinyl. And while you'll certainly be awed by all the artifacts and arcana included—from the wooden peach crate, the trucker hat, the ABB playing cards,

Led Zeppelin

the buttons, the magnets, the guitar picks and the posters—and of course, the original artwork on the albums (especially the back cover of *The Allman Brothers Band*, which shows **Duane Allman** standing slightly above the rest of the band, wearing a dark brown cape, his arms extended like the avenging angel he would become two years later)—the real prize is a rubber half-stack amplifier-shaped 8GB USB stick. It contains all nine albums as downloadable 44.1kHz/16-bit uncompressed AIFF audio files, so you can have hours of nerd fun, comparing the newly remastered versions of the Allmans' catalog with what has previously been available. The quality of the recordings takes a quantum leap forward and is worth the rather steep price tag. It's so unnervingly pristine that you can hear **Gregg Allman** take a quick anxious breath before starting the second verse of "Leave My Blues at Home," from *Idlewild South*, or witness the creeping dread of "Don't Want You No More" from *Beginnings*, then notice some of the dropped notes in "Mountain Jam," their elastic 33:43 reworking of Donovan's "There Is a Mountain," on their high-water mark, *At Fillmore East*. While the first five albums are certainly their best work, it's interesting to stroll through some of the later stuff, like 1975's *Win, Lose or Draw*, 1976's live album, *Wipe the Windows, Check the Oil, Dollar Gas* and 1979's *Enlightened Rogues*, to see how the band reformatted themselves and was able to survive artistically and psychically. The only moment of true transcendence on *Win, Lose or Draw* is Gregg's wounded "Can't Lose What You Never Had" but, other than that, it's a band who has lost its center and its sense of brotherhood, with tensions at an all-time high after Gregg broke camp and moved to LA after his marriage to Cher. It was their first artistic stumble, and afterwards they took a long hiatus, releasing the double live album *Wipe the Windows, Check the Oil, Dollar Gas* to give them some breathing space. While it doesn't reach the high pinnacle set by *At Fillmore East*, it's still a solid live album from a band that always shined brighter on a stage than in a studio, and this vinyl box set allows them to shine brightly one more time.

Jaan Uhelszki

Various Artists

Imaginational Anthem Vol. 8: The Private Press TOMPKINS SQUARE

In the never-ending deluge of newly uncovered rare recordings from ye olden days, the eighth volume in Tompkins Square's ongoing *Imaginational Anthem* series, of mostly solo and mostly acoustic guitar compilations, is a breath of crisp air. Over two LPs, producers **Michael Klausman** and **Brooks Rice** find various almost totally undocumented players from a range of eras and musical families, bound only by the mission to extract something new from their guitars. The album begins with a rich and perfectly haunted take of the blues standard "One Kind Favor" by **Perry Lederman**, an influence on folk pioneer John Fahey, as well as one of Owsley Stanley's early LSD representatives. Setting the tone, the music moves through a range of delicious atmospheres—each artist armed with their own story and voice. Homemade instruments gong and chime (**Herb Moore**'s "Wen Also Found"), electric exotica snakes over studio electronics (**Joe Bethancourt**'s "Raga") and duos chase each other (the **Keithe Lowrie Duet**'s "Snow Queen"). Dipping deep into the '80s, tracks like **Lee Murdock**'s "Where the Pinery Narrows" are reminders that handmade music has endured through all eras and production and techniques, sturdy and elegant and constantly surprising rejoinders to the ever-questing newness of pop.

Jesse Jarnow

Led Zeppelin

The Complete BBC Sessions RHINO

Does any Led Zeppelin fan, even the most rabid, need five live versions of "Communication Breakdown" on one album? Enter: *The Complete BBC Sessions*, a three-disc update of the band's archival set of recordings from 1969 and 1971. **Jimmy Page**, having already cleared the Zeppelin vaults with a slew of extra-padded reissues, manages to dust off some extra dusty BBC rarities—pushing the collection into overkill territory. This hyped third disc includes three grainy tunes ("I Can't Quit You Baby," "You Shook Me" and the sole performance of honking, piano-led "Sunshine Woman") tracked during a radio broadcast in April 1969. The rest? More solid but non-noteworthy BBC cuts, mostly of songs available on the first two discs. That said, the uninitiated should seize this opportunity to explore the original material. Disc one, which highlights four 1969 BBC sessions, finds The Golden Gods in prime early form: **John Bonham**'s tom-tom excursions and Page's psychotic noise push "Whole Lotta Love" into more demonic territory, while their infectious run-through of Robert Johnson's "Traveling Riverside Blues" is propelled by the ghostliest slide-guitar riff ever laid to tape. Disc two teases a blistering 1971 London concert, showcasing their majestic two-year evolution. While some of the softer performances (mandolin-led ballad "Going to California") are filled with clumsy transitions and jumbled vocal lines, the band sounds more propulsive than ever on the heavy numbers—including *Led Zeppelin II*'s "Heartbreaker," beefed-up by **John Paul Jones**' fluid bass fills. *The Complete BBC Sessions* doesn't deepen Led Zep's legacy—but they, the greatest hard-rock band in history, don't need it to.

Ryan Reed

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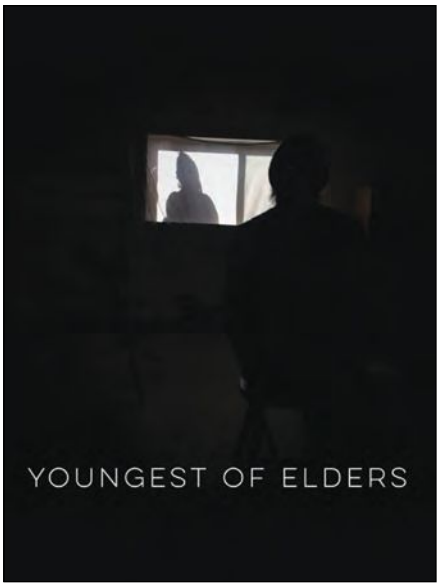
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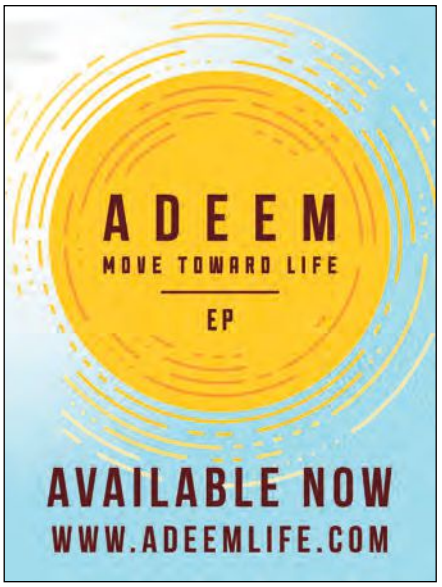
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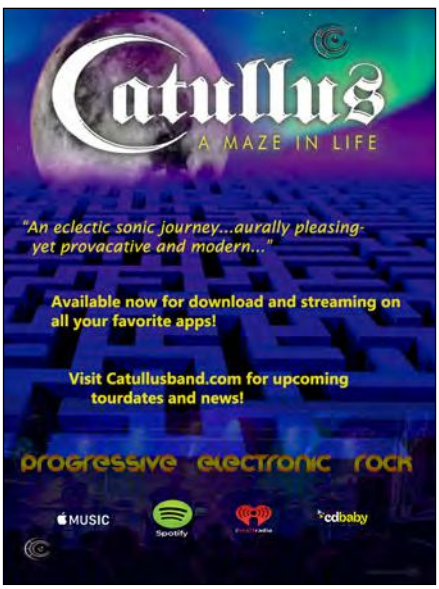
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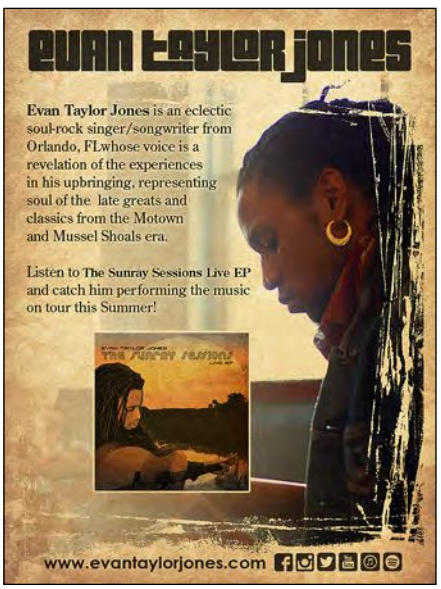
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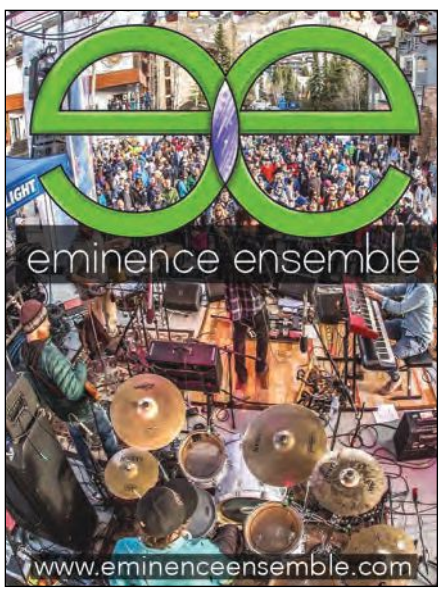

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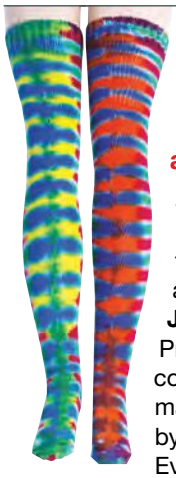

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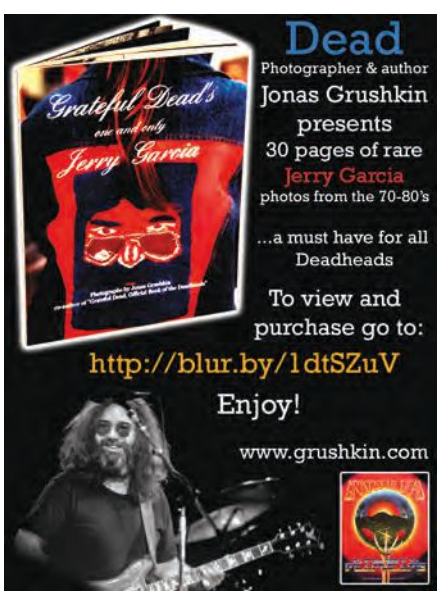


want to make *Half the City Two*—another record about heartbreak and sadness. The first time was appropriate, but it's important to grow. Plus, I'm a happily married man now—I got married in December of 2014. So with the lyrical content, I wanted to explore my Southern identity within the context of modern times. It's not necessarily political, but it's definitely not softball stuff either, which was a little scary."

Some of the imagery that inspired the new album had been with Janeway for years. "Since I was a kid, I was attracted to those old spiritual songs, like 'It Is Well' or 'On the Banks of Jordan,' that talk about the sea and storms. I'm no longer a practicing religious man but, even now, if I hear those songs, they move me in a certain way."

Bryan Stevenson's memoir *Just Mercy* had an impact as well. Stevenson is an Alabama-based lawyer who founded the Equal Justice Initiative, which assists indigent criminal defendants and those who receive wrongful or unreasonable prison sentences. "I've read inspirational books and books about race," Janeway says, "but this was one of those things that just hit me. I was bawling in my bed. I began asking myself if I even wanted to do music. It had such a profound impact on me; it just affected everything."

This opened the vocalist up to re-examining his own life within the context of his songwriting: "I've gone through some heavy things. Growing up working class, then up to middle class and then back down, there was a lot of turmoil in the household. Then, I had the element of church, where there was this duality. Later on, I lived in apartments where I couldn't pay the rent and had the power turned off. What I thought was normal was not normal."

Phillips affirms that these ideas informed and altered the music as it came together. "Rather than love songs, the thematic concepts focused on a refined, existential loneliness with regard to specific issues that are very relevant to 2016, whether that be racial prejudice or rigid gender roles or gun violence. A lot of these themes were so weighty that when we were creating the accompaniments for them, even if we didn't start out with heavy, dark, melodic ideas, we needed to match the thematic concepts present in the lyrics."

After attending Bonnaroo as a fan in 2005, 2007 and 2009, then working security in 2010, Paul Janeway savors St Paul & The Broken Bones' Bonnaroo debut in 2014.

All told, *Sea of Noise* still grooves and boils as the band moves forward with a new-found confidence and collective spirit. The horns remain bright and punchy, even if, at times, they pull back with a bit more restraint.

"It's still an R&B record," Phillips asserts. "It's just a modern take on it. I think that making this kind of R&B/soul record will help people stay with us no matter how weird it gets on the fringes. I feel like most people will see it as an expanded scope with familiar elements."

In the live setting, the two albums feel altogether complementary. The new songs may extend the group's thematic reach, but they build on the same rich body of sound. In this way, they reflect a range of struggles that people experience today, from those that are romantic in nature to larger questions about the direction of contemporary society.

Beyond this, the group's blithe and buoyant performance style remains a hallmark. A St. Paul & The Broken Bones show is a lively affair—all the more so now that the group is a brawny eight-piece, with Jason Mingledorff assuming saxophone, clarinet and flute duties, while Chad Fisher is on trombone, replacing Ben Griner, who left in 2015.

Janeway maintains that audiences can expect this aspect of the group's ethos to endure: "I look at Prince's live show, which stayed pretty consistent throughout his career. Though the music changed, the live show still had that special thing. It will be the same with us. The performance aspect is therapeutic for me, and that's what music has always been. Our live show is still going to have that special thing. The energy will be the same."

He pauses, then chuckles, adding: "Although, there may be some aspects that the 70 year olds won't like right away. When we nod to Radiohead's 'National Anthem' in the middle of the show, that's where it's going to get interesting."

Dean Budnick

Elmo Buzz style-appropriator Todd Snider is a Hard Working American at this year's Lockn' festival

Dean Budnick

the territory that I still needed to cover, and I realized I hadn't gotten around to being in a fight. I can t fight; I learned to fight f om watching dogs swim. So I tried to think, "What was the closest I had been to being in a fight since I as a kid?" There was this singer that wanted to fight me once at this bar called the 3 Crow, which would've been the easiest thing he'd ever done. I thought, "Well, I could use feng shui on him."

But if you're in a kick-ass, party-hardy rock-and-roll band, you better sing about fucking and fighting and ocking out. So we sang what was going to be the Eastside Bulldog fight son .

I'm genuinely proud of the background singing. I talk about the record like I was dismissive of it and, to be honest, I was—but I'm becoming less dismissive of it as I listen to it all this time later. I think it's honest. I wouldn't put it against the [Hard Working Americans'] *Rest in Chaos* record, but it's a diffe ent thing and I think it helped us with that one.

WAYS AND MEANS

By this time, I was out of ideas. So I turned to my buddy Peter Cooper and said, "What do I yell now?" He said, "Shout, 'Hey, hey, hey!'" Bingo! So I shouted, "Hey, hey, hey, you're going to be OK!" Then I thought, "Really? This is where we're going?" Earlier in the day, I had been telling Peter what we were going to do, and I asked him if he had any phrases that would work and he said, "Ways and means." So, 10 hours later, when I asked him, "What should I say?" and he said, "Hey, hey, hey," I thought maybe I should go back to what he said earlier.

Peter had also told me how he'd been to the Alley Cat, which is the bar we used to go to, and he'd seen Warren Pash, who wrote "Private Eyes." Later on, I was thinking about everything Peter had said to me, so I mentioned it. When we overdubbed the background vocals after I said, "I ran into Warren Pash," Peter and I yelled, "He wrote 'Private Eyes!'" You can barely hear it.

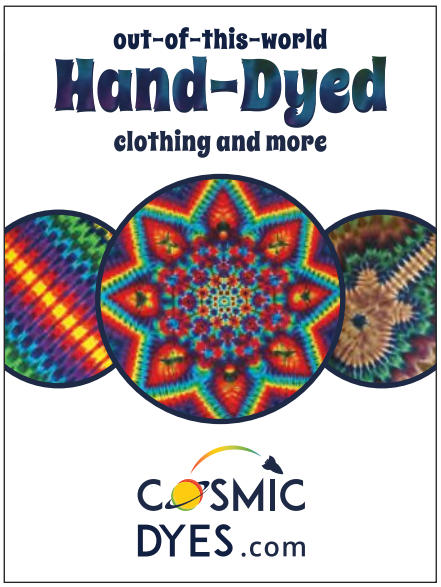
The person in the song sounded like some guy hitting on a girl and telling her she was going to make it, which is very East Nashville—telling her she might have mass appeal and could end up on the cover of the *Nashville Scene*. By the time it was over, I thought, "Damn, that worked. We did it again."

COME ON UP

There's this thought that you don't have to put a lid on a basket full of crabs because if one starts to climb out, the others will pull it down. A lot of towns are like that, but East Nashville is not. Everybody moves there with this grandiose idea that their songs are going to move some other person. So if you're feeling stupid in your town 'cause you want to sing your songs out loud, then come to East Nashville—that's all we fucking do.

I remember I had this manager who told me one time that I had to know myself, to be myself and I thought, "Bullshit, I don't want to do either of those things. Everything I know I learned from other people—stop trying to make me be myself. I'll be whoever I want to be." So I sang about that.

Then the last verse—I don't drink anymore, not because I don't want to but because I drank too much for too long and my body won't take it anymore. (Although, every time someone says that in a magazine, the next time you see them, they're drunk.) But not long ago, I used to wake up in the morning and walk to the bar. I used to be out of there by the time the people we called "amateur drinkers" got off ork and would come in. Sometimes around 4:20 would be the peak of the day in East Nashville, and that's when all the guitars would come out. So I was saying if you come here and walk around the bars at about 4:00, I'm going to be in one of them. I'll be fucked up singing to people who wish I would stop. Come see us. I thought that was a good note to end on. Make East Nashville weirder. Hurry up. We've been waiting for you.



grown into Colorado's house band, spawning countless side-projects, jam sessions and sit-ins. One former saxophonist, Dominic Lalli, went on to form livetronica outfit Big Gigantic, who the members of The Motet have continued to collaborate with on occasion.

"We've always been an evolving band and we've always embraced that," says Sayers, noting that Watts and his crew work to synthesize di° erent perspectives and styles that draw from varying but related traditions.

For his part, Divinsky views his contribution as perhaps a slow-drip infusion of his trademark soul sound. It's the flip side to what The Motet has already clearly mastered. And, in the process, Divinsky gets to expand on a branch of something that he was already doing.

"Funk is the extrovert, the party, the social, the fun and carefree side. Soul is the introspective, reflective side," says Divinsky. "They're super related. It's all reciprocal, energy-based performance."

The engine of the music fires on its own, with all the players locked together like gears and with Watts supplying a piston-like combustion thanks to his versatile and propulsive drumming, but the whole operation gets an external power source from the audience. Longtime Motet fans have followed the band as they've shifted gears and moved in new directions, so—while some newer listeners might get a mild sense of whiplash with the stylistic changes—the seasoned fans expect to be surprised.

Watts—who continues to serve as the ensemble's bandleader and arranger—says that keeping a large group together is outside of the skillset of most musicians, who tend not to focus on that on while mastering their art.

"You can't really go to school for that," says Watts of his elusive mix of people-pleasing, persuasion and leadership. "There's a lot of give and take. There's psychology there—there's interpersonal relationships there. It's about everyone feeling like they're being heard."

The members of The Motet have also always been happy to immerse themselves in the music of other artists. For years, their annual Halloween shows consisted of elaborate distillations of one artist's material. They've covered The Beatles, Talking Heads, Madonna, Michael Jackson, Prince, the Grateful Dead and others. Since 2013, they've been performing "mixtape" shows that zero in on the music of a specific year. So far, the band has stayed narrowly focused in time, perhaps to maximize the funk potential, having interpreted music from 1980, 1977 and 1975. But the practice and in-depth study of the covers has led to new, original Motet music.

"The Halloween show is always a huge event for us," says Sayers. "One of the reasons we got into writing music in the last few years was because we have this system of digging up old funk songs that were never huge."

After spending hours listening and learning and performing what they consider to be the work of the masters, the band always has a renewed sense of possibility about how to use what they've learned to inspire their own writing. According to Watts, the band doesn't even really need to discuss or analyze the creative lessons learned from what is essentially a musical boot camp leading up to Halloween each year.

"We would spend three months studying every album by Parliament-Funkadelic and then choosing our favorite songs," says Watts. "When you put that much time into one group, it naturally just seeps into your being and comes out organically."

"We've always been an evolving band and we've always embraced that." GARRETT SAYERS

* * *

IN ADDITION TO the band's study-filled lead-up to their Halloween shows and a set of yearly dates at the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheatre, as well as their busy, steady tour schedule, The Motet aims to write and record an album of new material each year. The next record will almost certainly mark another transition for the group. Divinsky, who's been an East Coaster until now, is even planning to move to Colorado after Thanksgiving.

"We're all transplants to Colorado," says Watts. "Most of us grew up on the East Coast. Most of us moved to Colorado because we were all tired of that rat race. There's a reason that Colorado has such an uplifting vibe and a lot of the music that comes out of here has it, too. That's the general feeling of the people here."

With Divinsky soaking up some mountain air and fully engaged with the band in preparation of the Halloween shows and the writing of new material, fans can be on the lookout for yet another twist from The Motet on their next album.

"We already have a bunch of ideas cooking for the next record," says Divinsky. "I'm looking forward to the next one when I'm able to be in it from the ground up."

"I don't think we're a country band," Starr admits when he digs into just what makes Blackberry Smoke appealing to country fans. "I've always thought of us as a rock-and-roll band. You could say there are elements of our music that might remind people of Lynyrd Skynyrd, which, if you look at those fir t two or three records now, those songs wouldn't be played on rock-and-roll radio. They'd be more likely to be played on country radio now."

He laughs and quickly corrects himself. "Actually, that's not true. Country radio wouldn't *touch* Skynyrd these days."

The current landscape of country music isn't conducive to a rugged, rough-and-tumble band like Blackberry Smoke, opting instead for the manufactured, aesthetically pleasing product of Music Row that will churn out hits. Yet, there they were, sitting atop the charts with *Holding All the Roses*.

"I love it with my whole heart," Starr says of what he calls "traditional" country music. "It's a very important part of my musical fabric. I grew up playing bluegrass and traditional country music before I discovered Black Sabbath and Aerosmith. There's a distinction between what is considered country music now and what *we* consider to be country music," he explains, adding that he doesn't want to sound like "an old man that keeps railing against new country music. But there's a lot of horrible shit out there. We don't want to be lumped in with some of that garbage.

"I've always thought that we were hacks when it came to being a country band because we're rock-and-roll guys," he says candidly. "But my favorite rock-and-roll bands did the same thing—the Stones were a great country band and the Dead could be a country band on a dime—sort of their version of it. It's all relative to music."

Starr describes Blackberry Smoke's story as a patchwork of "tiny, little victories," adding: "Then a certain situation we might be in might turn sour and that feels not so great."

Blackberry Smoke at Bonnaroo, Which Stage, 6/14/14

Dean Budnick

Their latest "tiny, little victory" comes in the form of *Like an Arrow*, which will be released in mid-October. It also marks their return to Rounder, which released *Holding All the Roses*.

Starr beams with pride when speaking about the new project. "With each record, we get a little closer to really saying who we are musically. Each record shows a little more maturity, as far as the band's playing together, and I'm just proud of the progress that we've had making records. It feels like such an accomplishment, and I feel like, now, we're really planting our fla . This is the record I'd like us to be remembered for."

The guitarist says all of that with immense pride before pausing and adding with a laugh, "But that'll probably change with the next one."

Like an Arrow is highlighted by another point of pride for him and for Blackberry Smoke: a duet with Gregg Allman on "Free on the Wing."

"Are you kidding—Gregg Allman?" Starr says with a fair amount of astonishment as he reflects on the collabo ation.

"My only regret is that we couldn't be there the day he recorded his vocals. We were in Spain. Gregg's a very gracious fellow. He's a sweet guy," he explains, sounding nearly choked up.

Starr gets nostalgic as he recalls his initial encounter with the Southern-music giant. "He's an intimidating presence. When I fir t met him, I was intimidated because he casts a very big shadow. But he's a nice man and was interested in what we were doing—very cool of him to lend a hand."

Blackberry Smoke's collaboration with Allman certainly brings their connection with the region's most iconic band back home. Starr recalls the fir t time he saw Warren Haynes perform with Gov't Mule, at a New Year's Eve show in 1995. "I was knocked out the fir t time I saw them because, obviously, it was very diffe ent than what he was doing in the Brothers," Starr says. "It was a little more ferocious."

The band got a full dose of that intensity earlier this year, when they embarked on a long jaunt with Gov't Mule dubbed the "Smokin' Mule" tour that saw a collaboration every night. "We wound up playing about 38 songs together in diffe ent formations—no repeats," Starr boasts. "Everything from Al Green to Neil Young, Funkadelic and, of course, the Grateful Dead."

Starr is also not shy about his affection for another former Brothers guitarist, Derek Trucks. "I think Derek is the best guitar player I've ever heard. Honestly. Ever."

> "There's a distinction between what is considered country music now and what we consider to be country music. But there's a lot of horrible shit out there. We don't want to be lumped in with some of that garbage."
>
> **CHARLIE STARR**

He lights up, adding: "[Trucks] has incorporated this amazing voice into his playing. No one I've heard does that. I don't even know how I'd describe it. It's an incredible style that he's developed."

This praise quickly leads into a story about the last time he saw the Tedeschi Trucks Band onstage, at Byron Bay Bluesfest in Australia. "[Trucks] had stitches in his left index finge , his fretting hand. He was laughing about it backstage, nervously, but he said, 'I gotta figu e out if I can do this.' He's playing the guitar with his index finger hanging f ee, and then I watched him bring 10,000 people to their feet with this long, beautiful solo on 'The Sky Is Crying.' I was just bowled over. Obviously, he can usually do that... but now, he can do it with one finger missin !"

Starr doesn't stop there. "[Trucks] was fantastic in the Brothers, but Tedeschi Trucks Band is probably the best band I've ever seen—not only powerful but very dynamic as well. Everything in its place; it's a beautiful thing to watch."

Blackberry Smoke's humility and reverence for their peers is certainly a beautiful thing as well. For a band that has taken its fair share of lumps, Blackberry Smoke have remained consistent and steadfast, constantly churning out records and continuing to hone their craft onstage. Now, Blackberry Smoke find themsel es staring a headlining tour in the face, only breaking to join Allman onstage at the upcoming Laid Back Festival in Atlanta around Halloween.

Despite their success across multiple genres, Starr isn't much for putting a label on Blackberry Smoke. "We're not necessarily a country band or a rock-and-roll band or a jamband or a Southern-rock band or whatever people like to call it. We really are just fi e guys from Atlanta playing music together."

Aaron Neville

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

THOUGH AARON Neville has steadily recorded over the years, *Apache* is a welcome return to the classic R&B, soul and funk sounds that earned him a reputation as the sweetest voice in New Orleans' fir t family. It also marks the fir t time that Neville has composed the majority of an album himself, co-writing with Rustic Overtones' Dave Gutter and Soulive/Lettuce's Eric Krasno, who served as *Apache*'s producer and contributed bass and guitar. Krasno stacked the sessions at Brooklyn, N.Y.'s Studio G with musicians from his inner circle, including his Lettuce bandmates Eric Bloom, Adam Deitch, Nigel Hall, Adam Smirnoff and yan Zoidis, Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings horn players Cochemea Gastelum and David Guy, Gregg Allman keyboardist and jam-scene mainstay Peter Levin and Deitch's Break Science/Pretty Lights collaborator Borahm Lee.

Neville also recently celebrated two milestones—his 75th birthday and the 50th anniversary of his breakthrough song "Tell It Like It Is"—with a cross-generational show at New York's Brooklyn Bowl that drew in his son Ivan as well as Krasno, Dr. John and The Meters' George Porter Jr. "It was a homecoming; it was New Orleans," Neville says. "Dr. John and I are the same age and grew up together. The fir t time I was ever in the studio, when I was 16, he asked me to sing backup vocals. And Ivan is one of a kind on the piano—he takes a little from my brother Art, a little from James Booker and is just a crackerjack musician."

Neville has been on a steady writing kick since releasing a book of poetry, *I Am a Song*, in 2014, and that inspired process carried over into his new album. Two of Aaron's new songs, "Orchid in the Storm" and "Sarah Ann," are love letters to his photographer wife Sarah Ann Friedman, who met Aaron when she shot The Neville Brothers for *People* in 2008. "This is the fir t time I've used most of my own writing," he says of the 10 *Apache* songs he wrote or co-wrote, after deep dives into doo-wop, gospel and more polished duets on his previous albums. "This is stuff I h ve been working on for a while."

Apache marks the fir t time that you've released an album of your own compositions. Did your collection of poetry spur this creative output?

I write with my iPhone so I have hundreds of poems on there. I'm always writing, whether it's for music or not—that's how I get through tough times. But I have to be inspired by something to write and, lately, I have been inspired by what's happening in the world. They say there is no global warming, but the seas are rising and the icecaps are melting. Look what just happened in Baton Rouge. Let's pray that there is never another Katrina. New Orleans is a bowl surrounded by water on all sides.

Your new album is both a return to your funky, New Orleans roots and something of your "New York record," crafted with the help of Eric Krasno and his collaborators. How did you enter their orbit?

I was hip to Soulive's music—my son Ivan has played with them a lot—and hooked up with them at one of their jam sessions through Marc Allan, my manager. I started sending Eric and Dave some of my poetry, and they'd send me back some ideas. I'd tell them if I liked a groove or part of a song—say "yay" or "nay." The Dap-Kings, Sharon Jones' band, added a lot of fi e to the pot, too. If you listen to *Apache*, you can't really tell that those musicians aren't from New Orleans. They have that *feel*.

The Neville Brothers reunited for a hometown concert around Jazz Fest last year. Are there any plans for more "farewell shows?"

We did the last Neville Brothers last year. I need time for myself now—that's the bottom line for that. We did 40 years with the Brothers, and they were great years. I gave 300 percent every night, and now I have to give 300 percent to this. I have a long way to go and a short time to make it in—that makes it simple. I have to do some stuff befo e I get out of here—before the Lord comes and says, "Aaron, bring it up, son." I want to do a blues album—I've never done one, but I used to do the blues all the time with The Hawketts in the '50s. I've been doing shows as a duo with a piano, and I've been doing quintet shows, with my brother Charles on saxophone, and I love both of them.

You were forced to flee ew Orleans during Katrina. Did you ever plan to move back?

A lot of people couldn't go back after Katrina because their places were completely destroyed. My house was destroyed, but I was, luckily, able to sell it. My wife Joel was dying of cancer at the time and she passed away in Nashville in '07. I've been in New York since I met Sarah.

We have a farm in Pawling, N.Y. Sarah's a great photographer but wanted to farm. I call her a "gangsta farmer." She did the irrigation here and has all sorts of stuff g owing. We have chickens. I don't have neighbors that close, so I don't bother nobody if I'm singing loud. I can hit whatever notes I want. The only ones that are gonna hear me are the chickens, and they don't mind. It's very peaceful. I call it Freville Farm.

Your longtime friend and collaborator Allen Toussaint passed away earlier this year. Do you remember your fir t encounter?

We went to school together—he was a couple of years ahead of me with Art and Charles—and we got together for the fir t time around 1960. He had The Flamingos with Snooks Eaglin, and we used to have a battle of the bands. We might be related, because he used to write under his mother's maiden name, Naomi Neville. He wrote and recorded "Over You" for my fir t record. [*Ed Note: Neville calls "Over You" the "OJ song" because of its subject matter. He wrote the single's B side, "Every Day" while in jail.*] It was a novelty song back in those days—you couldn't play that music today. A couple of years ago, he took some of my poetry and put it to music which was nice. I'm thinking about trying to put that out with some overdubs for him. He played a big part in my life. He was a great guy and a great musician.

LOS MUERTOS CON QUESO

JANUARY 25–28, 2017

RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO

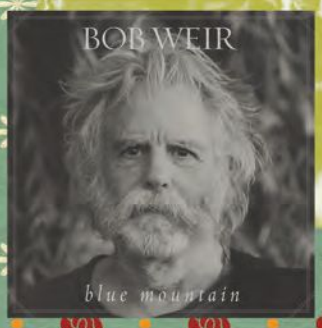
4 nights of music featuring:

BILL KREUTZMANN & BOB WEIR (3 Nights)
with DAVE SCHOOLS, JEFF CHIMENTI & TOM HAMILTON

THE STRING CHEESE INCIDENT (3 Nights)

with very special guests:

THE CHRIS ROBINSON BROTHERHOOD
AND MORE ARTISTS TBA!



losmuertosconqueso.com

All packages include a copy of Bob Weir's new album Blue Mountain - in stores now!

Phish
MEXICO: JAN 13-15, 2017
RIVIERA MAYA
AN ALL-INCLUSIVE CARIBBEAN
CONCERT VACATION
• 3 NIGHTS OF BEACHSIDE CONCERTS •
• ALL-INCLUSIVE TROPICAL RESORT STAY •
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